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LESS *than* KIN

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LESS *than* KIN

A Novel by

CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE

NEW YORK
THE JOHN DAY COMPANY
1926

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.
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TO MY

AUNT CLARA

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE WAS BORN IN San Francisco in 1881. At an early age he was forced into a business career, and until 1916 devoted his daily hours to insurance. But the urge to write commanded his leisure moments and for fifteen years he wrote steadily although to little practical purpose.

His first encouragement came when H. L. Mencken, then editing the *Smart Set*, bought one of his short stories. Upon the heels of this came two acceptances in the same mail, one from *Scribner's Magazine*, the other from the *Atlantic Monthly*. Shortly after, the pages of other magazines were opened to him; and thereupon Mr. Dobie abandoned business and devoted himself to letters.

For ten years he has given his entire time to writing and is today one of the most highly regarded short story writers. He has published two novels prior to LESS THAN KIN: THE BLOOD RED DAWN (1920) and BROKEN TO THE PLOW (1921).

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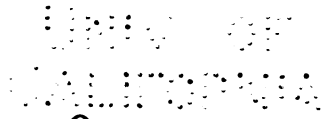

Chapter One

THE house sat back well from the lake: a very square, solid white house with a deep veranda running around three of its sides. Behind was a double row of smooth-trunked fig trees stooped with age. These fig trees were Adrienne's first memory. It was here in the hot midsummer afternoons that she had had her first moments of perception. Lying on her back she had gazed up into their cool green depths and become aware of blue-black fruit set cunningly upon the sleek limbs. At intervals an over-ripe fig fell to the ground. Immediately a horde of chickens fought for this discard of nature and devoured it. At other times an adventurous turkey, slinking through the shade, would lift its head and peck loose a low-hanging fruit; or, running forward, take a flying leap at one just beyond reach and swallow it with a look of infinite sadness. . . . Sometimes Adrienne liked the chickens best and sometimes the turkeys. She liked the cheerful noises the chickens made; but when the turkeys called mournfully across the tawny midsummer fields to one another she felt strange and near to whimpering. Sometimes she *did* whimper and then she was sure to see the tall slenderness of Mammy parting the gloom. Mammy was something like a turkey, slow moving and graceful, yet swift; and bronze, too, as a turkey was, but without the iridescences.

There was a cool competence in the touch of Mammy's wrinkled brown hand which could still any unrest

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or fright. Adrienne used to marvel at Mammy's length of finger and the spotless white of the kerchief folded austerely across the narrow chest. But the greatest wonder of all were the gold hoop earrings that glinted whenever the sun touched them and the moss-agate brooch encased in a thick rim of gold which held the linen kerchief in place.

These, then, were the things that first flashed across Adrienne's consciousness: fig trees; over-ripe fruit falling plummet-wise; chickens; bronzed turkeys; the brown slenderness of Mammy; white kerchiefs; golden ear-hoops; a moss-agate brooch. Not in such precise sequence, but merged, blurred, softly fused like a faint pastel.

* * *

Mammy was not her mother, of course. This she knew from the first. And yet no word had passed between them. But did a child have a mother? That was open to speculation. Calves had mothers, and kittens had mothers, and freshly hatched chicks had mothers. But a child! Adrienne wondered. Fathers she knew nothing of. It was a term that had never reached her. No one spoke of the new calf's father, or even of the kittens', or the freshly hatched chicks'.

Sometimes she pondered what made Mammy's hands so brown and hers so white. But in the end she always remembered the one cream-colored turkey in the flock and she held her peace. *She* was like a cream-colored turkey. And since she knew but one cream-colored turkey she had a faint sense that there was but

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one cream-colored child in the whole wide world, which meant in the cool shade of the fig grove.

Men she knew only vaguely: thick, ponderous, bearded animals that dug in the garden, and drove up the cattle with terrifying shouts. Strange creatures, truly, neither brown nor cream colored but a snarling red. They smelt sour, too, and they made clumping noises when they walked along the deep veranda that ran around three sides of the solid white house. . . .

This solid white house: you are not to suppose that Adrienne lived *there*. Nor Mammy either. Nobody lived in it. And yet it was filled with beds to sleep in and chairs to sit upon and tables to eat off. It had dishes, even. Such dishes! Pink and green with curious figures on them. Chinese, Mammy called them. Adrienne liked the sound of that name but it conveyed nothing. And on the walls were grave gentlemen and ladies, curiously pressed into things called frames, who never moved and yet were always smiling. These motionless ladies and gentlemen were the cause of Adrienne's first disillusionment. Obviously there were other cream-colored human beings in the world. Rigid and fixed, but still cream colored. Mammy said they were not people at all, only pictures. But, to Adrienne, this sounded like quibbling. If they were not people, why did they smile? . . . But, again she was puzzled: Why were there no brown-faced figures, like Mammy, pressed into frames? . . .

One day, Mammy told her a story. Summer had gone and they no longer spent hot silent afternoons under the fig trees watching the ripe fruit fall. Instead they crouched by a fire until their cheeks ached with

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the glow of it. This, Mammy said, was a fairy story and there were enchanted people in it. Enchanted! She liked that word from the first, just as she had liked the name Chinese, without understanding it. But it sounded for all the world like the sunlight that came filtering through the fig trees in the late afternoon to touch Mammy's golden ear-hoops. There was an enchanted castle in the story, a silent place, and enchanted people strewn over the length and breadth of it. Now, these enchanted people were all motionless; for years, and years, and years they had never moved. Until suddenly one day something—Adrienne was not sure just what—happened and then these motionless people began to move about and sing and laugh and play just as if they had been at these happy pursuits all their lives. . . . Now, she knew what was the matter with those flat, compressed people in their frames. They were enchanted. But one day, when you least expected it, they would suddenly begin to move about and lie in the beds and sit on the chairs and eat off the tables and feast out of the pink and green dishes with the curious figures on them.

* * *

Mammy and Adrienne lived in a low, whitewashed house a little to one side of the big one and nearer the lake. But, at the beginning, Adrienne never went near the lake shore because Mammy warned her against it: a great angry thing it was, to hear Mammy tell of it, that devoured children. Devoured was a word with an ugly sound and it did not matter what it meant for

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it was sure to be something dreadful. There were days when the lake was lovely and blue like a quiet child but again it would ruffle grayly and make terrifying noises. Mammy was right: the gloomy peace of the fig grove was much safer.

When the first rains came in October the grove was filled with the thick, musty smell of damp fig leaves. Only, that does not describe it, because the smell of fig leaves moist or dry is indescribable since they smell like nothing so much as themselves. But it was a smell never to be forgotten and in her whole life Adrienne never *did* forget the curious pungence that the rain coaxed from the fig leaves.

October also turned the grapes to sugar in the arbor near the great house. White and purple clusters of them, hanging down like clouded crystal balls. A little later the grape leaves flamed under the magic of the first frosts and they fell to the ground until the wind from the lake sent them dancing one could only guess where. And the sunburnt hills became faintly green and the lush California winter began. There followed gray, wind-swept days, and nights with storms beating in from the lake. But there was sunshine, too, at intervals. Not the thick, heady sunshine of midsummer but sunshine distilled to a sparkling amber, sunshine that it was pleasant to sit in.

Now the fig grove was deserted and the turkeys no longer ran under it, making flying leaps at darkening fruit.

But inside the low, whitewashed house Mammy sat by the fire telling tales. . . .

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Tales: Mammy knew hundreds of them. Sometimes they were of very pleasant people, beautiful, cream-colored people, who came so close to you that you could hear the rustle of their silk gowns and smell perfume as they passed. Ladies and gentlemen, Mammy called them. What gay lives they led, feasting, singing, dancing! Adrienne had never done any of these things but she knew at once what Mammy meant. She knew, because, somehow, somewhere she had been close to such things. When Mammy told these tales her voice was soft and the caress of her fingers was soft and the light in her eyes was soft, too. . . . Then there were the fairy tales, like the very first one Mammy had told at the close of summer, all about enchanted people and goblins and dark forests and lost children; and princes and princesses who lived happily ever after. When Mammy told these her voice was both soft and harsh; soft when she spoke of enchanted folk and lost children and princes and princesses; and harsh when she spoke of goblins and dark forests. You should have seen the light in her eyes when she mentioned goblins and dark forests. It made funny cold shivers come over you. . . . And last of all were the tales that Adrienne feared. She always knew when to expect them. At night, after a solemn, mournful day, when the wind had torn the Spanish moss from the gaunt trees and the rain had washed angrily against the panes. On such days Mammy would croon fiercely over her tasks—a monotonous, haunting tune that beat steadily like the drip of moisture from the eaves. And she would laugh darkly to herself and moan. Then, after supper was cleared away, crouching on her withered haunches be-

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fore the fire so that its red light dyed her in its blood, she would half recite, half chant weird happenings. Of people bronze like turkeys she chanted, and people purple-black like the figs that fell to the ground in midsummer. Of strange things called idols that raised hideous faces in the moonlight and devoured children. Of great green forests that had no open spaces through which the sun could filter. Of curious birds that flew from limb to limb, scarlet and gold and silver. And of animals swinging from great trees by their tails. . . . There was fire and blood in these stories. And when they were finished Mammy lay outstretched upon the floor and a white foam was on her lips. And Adrienne sat still, scarcely breathing. She did not feel close to any of these things. But she was frightened, much too frightened even to weep.

* * *

April and buttercups knee-deep wherever there is a mire. And with them an extraordinary event. Mammy and Adrienne are to take an excursion—the very first in Adrienne's whole life. They are to cross the lake, this very lake that devours children, mind you, in a boat that looks ever so much like a walnut shell, only larger. But, it seems, according to Mammy, that the lake is gentle in April and Adrienne is growing up. Five years old, fancy! And the lake's passion is for wee things, unless it becomes very angry indeed. . . . Such washing of faces and hands and behind neck and ears; and such a starched petticoat with frills that fairly stick out on all sides! Even Mammy is very grand with a wide-brimmed black straw hat that droops a

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trifle. One of the snarling red creatures is to leave his spading for a day and row them to the other shore; which red creature it has not yet been decided.

It proves to be Joe, more snarling red and sour smelling than all the rest, but strong of wrist. Crouched in the sheltering crook of Mammy's arms, Adrienne watches the oars dip into the water and rise again, dripping. There is an obvious connection between this process and the slow motion of the boat but Adrienne cannot quite coördinate cause and effect. It is puzzling, as puzzling as whether children have mothers. Joe's shirt is unbuttoned, exposing a great, hairy chest. Yes, it is just as she fancied: men *are* animals! . . . The sun is warm and caressing and Adrienne begins to nod. . . . Suddenly there is a bump . . . a scraping sound. Mammy cries out: "Wake up, Adrienne! . . . We're at Denton's."

* * *

Mrs. Denton came down a path to welcome them, followed by a running child. She said to Mammy:

"So you've come at last! . . . And so this is the little girl!"

They scrambled out of the boat and Adrienne hung back.

"She's shy," explained Mammy. "You're the first woman she's seen—except me."

Mrs. Denton laughed shrilly. Her voice was not soft and pleasant like Mammy's.

"Imagine that! . . . What's her name? . . . Adrienne! . . . Sort of outlandish ain't it? . . . Well, Adrienne, I'm Mrs. Denton and this is Stanley."

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Adrienne was interested in Stanley. She had never seen anything so curious. Mammy guessed her confusion. "That's a little boy," she explained.

"Boy!" Adrienne echoed, unenlightened.

"Imagine that, now, she don't know what a boy is!" exclaimed Mrs. Denton.

"Yes, a little boy," Mammy crooned. "Some day he'll grow up and be a man."

"Like Joe!" flashed through Adrienne's mind.

She didn't believe it. Not grow up to be an animal with a hairy chest! . . . It was too outrageous.

"That's innocence for you!" cried Mrs. Denton. "Well, she'll learn soon enough!"

"Learn what?" thought Adrienne. Something horrid she was sure or Mrs. Denton would not have said it so unpleasantly. She didn't like Mrs. Denton.

The path was a very long one and it led to a house finally, set between two huge palm trees. Not a painted house but a house all drab and weatherbeaten like the pig-sties at home.

There was litter all over the front yard instead of a garden and a hole full of rusty tin cans and filthy rubbish, in which bedraggled chickens scratched.

"Come inside while I get dinner," said Mrs. Denton to Mammy. "The kids can play."

The two went inside leaving Adrienne speechless and terrified. . . . But the boy was not at a loss for words.

"My name's Stanley," he announced grandly. "What's yours?"

"Adrienne," she fairly whispered.

"Adrienne what else?"

"Just Adrienne."

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"That's silly," said Stanley. "Everybody has two names. Your own and the name you get from your father. What's your father's name?"

Adrienne became cautious. She was sure she had no father but she did not feel called upon to admit it. So she fell back on silence as her defense.

Stanley went on: "My father's name is Denton. His other name is Jim. He takes people out fishing. You should see the worms he digs. Pails of them. . . . Do you want to go see the borax lake?"

Adrienne nodded. She was glad something diverting was to happen. They walked to the back of the house, past tumbling barrack-like buildings and sagging barns. The litter and filth grew. They skirted a moist meadow and came finally to a spread of water at the foot of a sheer, dark cliff that rose up before them in frowning grandeur. Having just crossed a lake of fair proportions Adrienne could not find anything of remark in a shallow pond. Stanley sensed her disappointment.

"This ain't nothing, *now!*" he said. "But you should see it in August when it's all dried up. It's all white and shiny. And cracked, too, like an old man's face. You can walk on it then and it crunches."

But Adrienne remained politely incredulous, staring up at the gigantic cliff that seemed to meet the sky halfway.

"You didn't tell me your father's name, yet," Stanley shot out at her in sudden malevolence. Adrienne set her lips firmly and cautiously against incrimination. "Maybe he's dead," ventured Stanley.

"Yes," assented Adrienne quickly, "he's dead."

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"Then what about your mother?"

Adrienne reflected. This was a fresh complication.

"She's not dead, too, is she?"

Adrienne considered carefully. It didn't sound reasonable that her mother should be dead, too, so she said: "Oh, no, she's not dead."

"Where is she, then? . . . That nigger ain't your mother, is she?"

"You—you mean, Mammy?"

"I mean that nigger that brought you over."

Adrienne felt her heart stand still. A nigger! What could he mean? Nothing nice, she was sure of that. Nice words never had a mean sound and this new word did sound mean, meaner than any she had ever heard.

Stanley was throwing pebbles into the borax lake. "She's a nigger, all right enough. . . . Everybody who is black is a nigger. I know because my father told me."

Adrienne wanted to cry. "She's not black!" she shot out passionately. "She's brown—brown like a turkey!"

"It's all the same," returned Stanley judiciously. "Anybody that ain't white is a nigger."

His finality silenced her; she drew away crushed.

"Let's play!" cried Stanley with irrelevant enthusiasm.

Adrienne shook her head.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like you."

He answered by knocking her down. She got up with great dignity and walked back toward the house, smoothing out the ruffles in her starched skirt. He followed after, crestfallen. She wasn't really angry,

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now. Perhaps because she had a vague sense of triumph.

As they came in sight of the out-buildings, again, he sidled up to her. "Are you going to tell?" he asked plaintively.

"Tell what?"

"That I knocked you down."

She eyed him scornfully. "No!" she snapped back.

He flashed her a look of relief and admiration. "Most girls would."

Her answer was a sniff.

"Are you still mad at me?"

"Yes." . . . She stamped her foot. "Mammy *isn't* a nigger!"

"I'll take it back if you want me to."

She didn't know just what he meant but it sounded generous.

At that moment the voice of Mrs. Denton reached them.

"Come—dinner's ready!" cried Stanley, putting out his hand.

She slipped her hand in his and together they raced back to the house.

* * *

Mr. Denton—Jim Denton—was out with a fishing party and Mammy and Adrienne had to leave without seeing him. But, somehow, Adrienne remained indifferent to this fact. She had a very definite idea of Jim Denton: he would be like all men—red, hairy and sour smelling. Besides she was too overwhelmed by Stanley's revelations to be diverted by anything further. A

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nigger! The word hummed in her ears all day. After dinner Stanley insisted on "taking it back," but curiously Adrienne knew that it was all an empty gesture. She had a sick feeling that Stanley was right: Mammy *was* a nigger! That's why none of her kind ever had been pressed into gilt frames and hung on the walls of the great house. And that was why Mammy upon occasion told terrifying stories about fig-black people, until she lay in a stupor, with a white foam on her lips.

They left at four o'clock. A delicate haze made the opposite shore seem remote and fantastic. Adrienne was sleepy and tired, yet she sat bolt upright, trying to keep awake by watching the oars dip and rise, dip and rise, again.

Finally Mammy said:

"What's the matter, honey? . . . Don't you want to come to Mammy?" She stretched out her brown hands, but Adrienne held back. Should she tell Mammy what Stanley had said? No, perhaps Mammy didn't know, herself. Could one be a nigger and not know it? . . . Did cows know they were cows? And turkeys that they were turkeys? And chickens that they were chickens? . . . She doubted it. . . . She knew that she was a little girl, because Mammy had told her. . . . But what if she weren't? . . . What if she were something with a horrid name? Not a nigger, of course, she definitely knew she couldn't be that. But something equally evil sounding. . . . Did God know that Mammy was a nigger? She hoped not. Mammy had described God to her once: a terrifying person who was always hovering about. Everywhere, God was

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everywhere! And he knew everything! It came to her with crushing force—he knew *everything!* Then, he *did* know about Mammy! . . . To have God know, a person who was so fussy and particular! It seemed hopeless. The tears began to gather in Adrienne's eyes. They rolled down her cheeks and splashed upon the ruffles of her skirt.

"Tired, honey? . . . Come to your Mammy!"

Great sobs shook her. She held back no longer. It didn't matter what Mammy was; it didn't matter whether God disapproved or not. She sank into the lean, soothing arms, with a catch of breath.

When she woke up, she was in her tiny bed and the sun was pouring in the room.

* * *

Suddenly, by reason of that April-day excursion Adrienne's world had been enlarged. First there had been the fig grove; then, the little whitewashed cottage in which Mammy and she lived, then, the great house, then the lake, and finally Denton's. Denton's added such a lot, with its jig-saw house and the outbuildings, and the borax lake, and the frowning cliff shooting straight up into the sky.

And supplementing all this Mammy told stories of its past. It seemed that its glories had not always been so faded. Once a Mr. Fieldbusch, a German, had owned it. German—this was a new word. Adrienne was neither attracted nor repelled by it. At least, she felt that from its sound it was nothing disgraceful. Well, this German had made beer, a bitter drink which

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little girls knew nothing about, and he was very rich. So he had built that cunning little house with its peaks and narrow porches for a summer home. Every year the family came up from the city and there were the gayest of times. But the house grew too small for all the guests and so Mr. Fieldbusch began to build guest-houses, row upon row of them, two stories high, not beautiful but comfortable, no end comfortable. And what times everybody had! Until Mr. Fieldbusch lost his money to a dishonest partner and then nobody came except old Mr. Fieldbusch himself. And one day even he stayed away, because some one else took the property.

Adrienne couldn't quite understand why all the good times should have stopped just because Mr. Fieldbusch had no more money. Wasn't the tiny little house there, and the outbuildings, row upon row, with plenty of beds for everybody? Mammy explained that guests had to eat; and how could Mr. Fieldbusch buy food for his friends if he had no money? Well, what was the matter with the guests bringing their own food? asked Adrienne. At this Mammy began to chuckle hoarsely, and she kept it up all day.

The place had been empty for years, falling to rack and ruin, until one day Denton had descended upon it. It was reported that he paid a ridiculous rent to somebody for the privilege of living in the tiny cottage, but Mammy didn't believe it. Just no-account white trash, was the way Mammy characterized the Denton clan. Adrienne's heart leapt with pleasure. That evened Mammy's score somehow: to be no-

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account white trash must be as bad, if not worse, than being a nigger. Adrienne felt this by the disdainful curve to Mammy's lips when she let the words slip between her teeth.

But when Mammy admitted that she never had known Mr. Fieldbusch, nor seen the jig-sawed cottage in its heyday, nor looked upon any of the gay company that had assembled there, Adrienne was puzzled.

"Why, I haven't lived on this lake all my life, honey," Mammy explained.

But she didn't say where she *had* lived and Adrienne was afraid to ask. She was afraid that it might hark back to that mysterious great green forest that Mammy told such terrifying things about—that forest through which the sun could never filter, filled with curious birds, scarlet and gold and silver, that flew from limb to limb. And animals with great tails swinging from trees.

The world was greater than Adrienne ever had imagined. It extended even beyond Denton's! Really extended beyond it. For, in spite of the strange places that Mammy had told about, Adrienne had never believed in them. And, now, there was a chance that they really were true. Mr. Fieldbusch came up every year from the city. The city! . . . What sort of a place was that?

Mammy answered without hesitation. It was a grand place with street after street and thousands of people in it. And what was a street? Mammy explained. Very grand—was it *very* grand? . . . Then, why did Mr. Fieldbusch ever leave it? . . . Mammy only laughed. It was plain she couldn't answer that

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question. And for the first time Adrienne began to doubt Mammy's complete infallibility.

* * *

So many new things happened in Adrienne's fifth year. Or was it just that she was noticing? In August a man appeared one day upon the scene. At first Adrienne refused to credit her senses. A man neither snarling red nor hairy chested nor sour smelling. A funny-looking man with a bit of hair on his upper lip called a mustache, who began by talking very pertly to Mammy and ended by being very respectful. This man came as a representative of the school district to inquire when Adrienne was to start to school.

"To school?" Mammy's haughtiness was magnificent. Even Adrienne realized that.

Yes, didn't Mammy know that there was a law compelling every one to have an education? Mammy unbent: education, that was different. A child could be taught at home, could it not?

Ah, then, the little girl was to have a governess! Very good. But he would like to know how soon it was all to be started; and the young woman's name if possible. . . . He took out a pencil and a book ready to write it all down.

Mammy wasted no words. If there was any teaching to be done she would do it herself. And then she quite took the man's breath away with all the things she knew. French for one thing, and history, and some Latin, and—

But did she know the three R's? It appeared she did. At least she convinced the man. All she needed,

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Mammy declared, was a list of books that they used in the school: she would do the rest. The man scribbled on one of the sheets of his notebook, tore out the leaf, and left it with Mammy.

When he had gone Mammy turned to Adrienne and said: "He just thought I was a no-account nigger who didn't know my A B C's . . . Well, I'd like to see any country school ma'm get the best o' me. . . . I didn't work in a convent in New Orleans for nuthin'."

Nigger! That was the first time Mammy had used that word. *He just thought I was a no-account nigger.* Mammy sounded pretty confident about it; sounded as if she wasn't what people took her for, after all. Perhaps she had been fooling everybody. Adrienne hoped so. She just wanted the satisfaction of proving to Stanley Denton that Mammy was a very grand person. A convent in New Orleans! What a fascinating sound that had! . . .

Two weeks later a parcel of books arrived.

"On Monday we'll begin school!" declared Mammy.

Adrienne was thrilled.

* * *

The musty shade of the fig grove again. But not a place for dreaming, now, but a place of activity. Books, pencils, a slate—in short, school. Adrienne liked some of it and some of it irked her. "If you had two apples and I gave you four more how many—" No, she didn't like that sort of lesson! And she couldn't see that it mattered. She'd have enough apples—of that she was certain; the precise number seemed unimportant. But—"See the apple. The

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apple hangs on the tree. The apple is red." That was something like. That brought visions of a beautiful red apple before you. Why you could almost smell it! No bother about how many apples were on the tree—one or twenty—the redness and the fragrance were all there. There was no redness nor fragrance in, "If you had two apples and I gave you four more"—no redness nor fragrance, only numbers. She would have six apples under this arrangement, Mammy explained. But who cared for six apples without color or smell. . . . Later on Mammy robbed her even of the colorless apples in this exercise. It merely became "How many are two and four?" As dry and dismal and unimportant as that! . . . But the other sort of learning—*that* grew better and better:

"The apples are ripe in the orchard, the work of the reaper is done." Words that sang. Poetry, Mammy called it. It was beautiful to read, but you could sing it, too. Not under the fig grove at lesson time but later on when you were alone, perhaps sitting on the sand within stone's throw of the ever-lapping lake, out of sight and earshot of everybody. Or at twilight when the gnats began to fly.

"The apples are ripe in the orchard, the work of the reaper is done."

You could put your doll to sleep with that!

Mammy sang sometimes, when the mood was on. In a voice a little quavering, but rich with a strange sad tenderness, "Ole Black Joe," "Lay Down the Shovel and the Hoe," "Carry Me Back to Ole

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Virginny." But often she was gay and waggish: "Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me!" "Tassels on My Boots," "Champagne Charlie," "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines!"

Adrienne listened. And in secret, she tried them herself. She learned every word of "Tassels on My Boots" as a surprise for Mammy. Then, one night, after supper she sang it.

"Why, honey-child, I *do* believe you're going to be a singer!" Mammy cried out in her first delight.

But it appeared one did not just sing that kind of a song. One sang and danced it. Mammy explained where she had first heard it. At the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco. A gay lady, Emilie Melville, had sung it. In tights, with bright red tassels on her high-laced boots.

"Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!"

Walking back and forth as you sang it with little mincing steps and your skirt held high to disclose the imaginary tassels dangling from the imaginary boots. And ending with a little whirl about on your toes and a smile. It was capital! Even Mammy, old as she was, made you see how it must have been done by the gay Emilie Melville, years and years ago in San Francisco. That was the city that Mr. Fieldbusch had come up from every year to his jig-saw cottage. How could he, how *could* he have left such a gay place! Now, Adrienne knew what made cities so fascinating.

"Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!"

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Singing and dancing—singing and dancing! Back and forth, back and forth on the broad veranda of the great house. High up on the broad veranda, because Emilie Melville had sung, standing high above people's heads—on a stage, Mammy had told Adrienne.

"Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!"

Could anything be more entrancing than the feeling you had as you sang and danced, sang and danced, flashing imaginary tassels on your imaginary boots before an imaginary audience below! And ending with a little whirl on your toes, and a smile and bow.

Why, "The apples are ripe in the orchard," couldn't begin to compare with it! Adrienne simply had never imagined that life could hold such pleasure.

As for Mammy, she clapped time with her lean hands, and laughed and laughed and laughed.

"Well, child, you *do* beat all!" was her comment.

* * *

At this point life held only one disturbing thing for Adrienne. Not the "How-many-is-two-and-four" lessons: they were merely tiresome. But something which concerned Mammy and the big house. Every so often Mammy would say: "Adrienne, honey, I'm going to be busy at the big house and I don't want you to stir from *our* garden . . . Do you understand?" Adrienne didn't understand but she obeyed. She stayed close as close could be to *our* garden—a little patch of blossoming fragrance, hedged with cypress; that shut out the big house completely from view. At first it hadn't mattered, but later, when one knew just how

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many two and four were, and all about the red apple hanging from the tree, and "The apples are ripe in the orchard," and "Tassels on My Boots," why one couldn't help wondering. Sometimes, Mammy would be busy for a day, sometimes for two days—rarely longer than two days. Adrienne saw her only at meals which were delayed beyond their appointed hours and at bedtime. Even then, she very often had to fly back for an hour or two, leaving Adrienne terrified and lonely.

One day it suddenly occurred to Adrienne what she would do the next time Mammy left her alone all day. It came upon her while she was chasing a chicken out of Mammy's pansy bed. The chicken had flown from her, screaming and cackling, and pop, like that, it disappeared from view and into safety through a break in the cypress hedge. Adrienne stooped over and looked. Why, one could see out, just as plain, across to where the big house stood. There it was, huge and white, the veranda and everything! How was it possible to see anything so huge through such a little hole? . . . What was to prevent her from peering through this same little hole the next time Mammy shut her up in the garden? Of course, she couldn't see what went on *inside* the house, but, then one never could tell, she might see *something.*

And the next time Mammy left her alone she looked through the break in the hedge. All morning she lay upon her belly kicking her heels into the air. It was fascinating, peering through a hole like this, even if one saw only familiar things. And that was all the morning yielded—familiar things. But the afternoon

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was better. In the afternoon the door of the big house opened and Mammy came out followed by a man. Adrienne alternately squinted and opened her eyes wide and peered through her fingers at this apparition. A very nice-looking man if she could believe her senses, almost nice enough to have stepped out of one of the gilt frames. Could it be possible that one of those stately persons had been *dis*enchanted? There was something at once entrancing and terrifying in the thought. *Dis*enchanted, like the bewitched people in Mammy's tales? . . . But by whom? . . . Was Mammy—?

She scrambled to her feet and fled to the house. Suppose it were possible! Mammy! . . . And suddenly a flood of stories descended on her, stories that had to do with lonely, untenanted houses, and little girls and boys and even grown-ups who were forbidden this and that, and who disobeyed these injunctions and paid a horrid penalty. There was poor Mrs. Bluebeard, for instance. She had been told repeatedly not to unlock that door and she did. Well, she hadn't died but she had come near to it. And there was Mrs. Lot—she had been told not to look back and one had to admit that her end was tragic enough. A pillar of salt! . . . It made Adrienne fairly shudder. Even Adam and Eve—they'd been warned against the apple. She remembered, now, that Mammy had called Bluebeard a fairy tale in spite of the fact that there wasn't a single fairy in it. And fairy tales were not really true.

She began to take heart until she thought of Mrs. Lot and Adam and Eve—Mr. and Mrs. Adam, she would have called them if it had been her story. These

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came out of the Bible and Mammy said that anything that came out of the Bible was true. Well, there you were, no better off than you were at the beginning. But, why the story of Mrs. Lot was true and the story of Mrs. Bluebeard just made up, she couldn't imagine.

All the afternoon she fluctuated between fear and reassurance. After all, Mammy hadn't commanded her not to peek. Stay in *our* garden! That had been the precise injunction, nothing more nor less. Hadn't she stayed in the garden? Yes, she had. But something told her that Mammy would have added: "And don't peek through that hole in the hedge!" if she had known that the hole was there. It seemed pretty plain: Mammy had some power over all those people pressed into frames and she didn't want Adrienne to know about it. And, if she found out she would be furious! . . . But would she find out? If she could disenchant people *anything* was possible. Folks that could do that always found out. Didn't Mr. Bluebeard find out? And God? . . . Of course God's case was very special. But witches! There! The dread word had escaped her. Mammy was probably a witch and not a nigger at all. She just made people think she was a nigger. That was a way witches had of pretending to be something they weren't.

There was nothing to do but wait for evening to come. When Mammy came back to the cottage to get supper either something dreadful would happen or things would go on just as they were. If something dreadful happened it would prove that Mammy was a witch and if things went on as they were then Mammy was just an ordinary person.

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Adrienne had to admit that there were moments when she hoped for the worst. It was so exquisitely terrifying to speculate on the dreadful thing that might happen. Mammy might enchant her and press her into a gilt frame. That would be fun. To hang upon the wall of the big house and look down at everything that went on there. And every so often to be disenchanted and walk about for a day or two. Had all these people, strung along the walls of the big house, either quitted the garden or peeked? Very probably. . . . Or, she might be turned into a frog like the prince who dived down into the well for the princess' golden ball and became himself again. . . . Or Mammy might turn her out of the house, and out of *our* garden, locking the gate on her as she cried: "Henceforth, you are to wander over the face of the earth, without home or fireside!" *That* would be thrilling! Just think of all the adventures she would have! The castles and beautiful ladies and the princes she would see. Until one day she would come to a city and a palace grander than all the rest. And everybody in that city would look sorrowful and when she asked them the reason they would say: "The eldest son of the King is sick because he cannot find a maiden for his wife that is as beautiful as the princess he once saw in his dreams." And Adrienne would go up boldly to the palace, a beautiful, golden palace glistening in the sun, and beat upon the door. And the man who opened the door would frown at her and demand her errand. But she would not be frightened in the least. She would merely make a little bow, because it was proper to be polite, and say: "I hear that the King's eldest son is sick. I have come a

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a long way and I think I have a secret that will cure him." Whereupon the man would frown still harder and ask her if she knew the penalty of failure. Of course she would know—the penalty of failure in anything concerning kings and queens and princes was death! . . . Then, the man would escort her into the chamber of the sick youth and as soon as she entered the room the King's eldest son would cry out: "This is the princess of my dreams!" And, so they would be married, amid great feasting, and live happily ever after. Adrienne had heard such a story from Mammy's lips, many times, but she had never thought of herself as a part of it. Could it be possible for a little girl like her to have such an adventure? But, in spite of all these exciting possibilities, Adrienne felt her heart stand still when she heard Mammy's feet crunching along the gravel paths of *our* garden. Promptly, she fled into the cottage and hid herself under Mammy's bed. But Mammy entered calling as gayly as she ever did and Adrienne popped from under the bed lest the situation might lead to questioning.

Well, there wasn't anything about Mammy's demeanor to indicate that she had even the slightest suspicion of what had gone on. And, after the first flutter of trepidation, Adrienne began to feel more and more disappointed. Mammy must be just an ordinary person, disillusioning as the truth was. Adrienne was distinctly annoyed; as any one is who has been cheated. Indeed, she was so annoyed that she ended by being cross over it all. She couldn't find the slightest excuse for Mammy's conduct. If Mammy wasn't a very special sort of creature what right had she to give any

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commands? Mr. Bluebeard and God were different. And a person who didn't have a right to give commands certainly wasn't anybody to be afraid of.

As Mammy undressed her that night Adrienne asked: "Will you be busy some more at the big house?"

"Yes," answered Mammy. "For a couple of days more, honey. . . . Why, have you been lonesome?" Adrienne pretended that she had been. "Well, never you mind, honey, some day when you grows up, Mammy will let you come over to the big house and help her."

"Ain't I big enough to help you, now?"

"No, honey."

"I wouldn't get in your way."

" 'Tain't that, honey."

A flash of daring swept over Adrienne. What if she were to say: "Who was that man I saw you talking to, to-day?" But the madness passed. Instead she thought: "You, just wait until to-morrow! . . . I'll find out all about it, to-morrow!"

* * *

Mammy left for the big house bright and early next morning. Adrienne threw herself on her belly in front of the hole in the cypress hedge and waited. Any number of daring plans were in her head. Should she wait until Mammy and the strange man came out of the house and then fly screaming into the open? Or walk up the broad steps to the veranda with the utmost assurance? Or deliberately wander into the big house without any further cue? . . . She decided to wait. It seemed more discreet.

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At ten o'clock she saw the great door swing slowly open. She held her breath. Out walked the man, *alone!* He had on clothes of a light gay color and a straw hat was cocked on one side of his head with a bright silk band upon it. Adrienne had never seen a male creature like him. He was magnificent! He came down the steps swinging a bamboo walking stick, a cigarette between his teeth, and he was humming. In the still morning air Adrienne heard him distinctly. He crunched along the path, stopped a moment under one of the magnolia trees to renew the light in his cigarette, and walked deliberately toward the cypress hedge. Adrienne's heart was pounding—now was the time! He came so close that his shadow darkened the hole through which Adrienne was peering. Then he veered sharply and was lost to view. Adrienne heard the grinding of his shoes against the gravel and the echo of the tune he was humming floated back in the heady sunshine. She ought to be on her feet that instant and in pursuit of his retreating figure —but a curious terror robbed her of the ability to rise. Yet desperation at least gave her a voice and she was startled to hear herself call out loudly:

"Mr. Man . . . Mr. Ma-a-a-n!"

The footsteps halted.

"Mr. Man . . . Mr. Ma-a-n!"

"Who is calling?" His voice—his very own voice!

"It's me—Adrienne! . . . A little girl on the other side of the hedge."

"Well, come out and see me, then."

"I dassn't. . . . You come and see me."

A dead silence broken by the click of the latch on the

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gate. Adrienne stood up. "Here I am!" she called.

He came over to her with a startled look.

"Well, a little girl for a fact! And what did you say your name was?"

"Adrienne."

"Adrienne what?"

Adrienne what? Why did he have to be tiresome like Stanley Denton? "Just Adrienne, that's all!" Her voice rang out defiantly.

He put his hand upon her head and turned her face up to his. "Amber, eh!" he said, looking down into her eyes. "Adrienne Ambereyes."

She gave a little sigh of relief. *Adrienne Amber-eyes!* . . . At last she had another name!

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Chapter Two

DUSTIN HUNTLEY, speeding back to San Francisco from Lakeview in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and three, could never remember a time in his life when he had been more perturbed. Perturbed? No, that was a mild way of putting it! "Adrienne Ambereyes!" He hadn't realized until the idle words had escaped him quite the import of the astounding fact of a child with amber eyes at Laguna Vista. A child with the unmistakable Sinclair eyes in the custody of that infamous old Selina Parsons! . . . It was enough to bowl any one over. In his entire confusion he had let the circumstance pass with a quiet acceptance of the smirking mulatto's explanation—or rather lack of it. Coming upon him in company with the adventursome child, she had said brazenly: "What do you think of my little charge, Mr. Huntley?" in that mild, moving voice of hers and with all the assumed airs of a great lady. Huntley knew enough to be discreet when she lapsed for a moment from the pliant serving woman and took that tone. Without waiting for him to reply she had finished adroitly: "I've taken her just for company. . . . You've no idea how lonely I get! . . . I hope there's no objection!"

He felt that he must say something.

"Objection? . . . From whom?"

"Well, Justine Forsythe—" the shrewd old eyes became two pin pricks of malice. "As I remember she has notions."

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He laughed, to discount any impression she might get of her importance. "Quite right! . . . She has. But only about things that matter. . . . Whether there is a child or not at Laguna Vista would be of complete indifference to *Mrs.* Forsythe, I'm sure."

At which old Selina had smiled cryptically and there the matter had ended.

Now, he was wondering whether he had done the right thing. Should he have demanded an explanation then and there? . . . For what? For a child with amber eyes? No, that would have been absurd. Worse than that, indiscreet. Whatever cards Selina Parsons held up her sleeve, there was nothing to be gained by forcing her to play them.

But he might have asked a few questions just to have noted the effect of his inquiry upon her—the child's name, perhaps—something of its antecedents. Selina would have lied, of course, in that magnificent way she had. But the tenor of her untruths would have been illuminating, at least diverting.

It was to have been expected, of course, something of this sort from Selina Parsons. *Was* expected, to put it more properly. Else why had the Sinclair heirs permitted her to reign undisturbed at Laguna Vista? . . . Not just this thing—a child with amber eyes. But there were always potential scandals flapping at the heels of Selina. And more than one prominent San Francisco family had breathed a sigh of relief to discover her stepping from the questionable niche she occupied in that town to the brooding calm of Crystal Lake. Many a quavering old-timer had said: "Selina

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Parsons—gone to live in the country? . . . The old gal must be getting old!"

Dustin Huntley himself had never known Selina Parsons in her heyday, but the quality of her intrigues was still vivid in the mind of the public as late as the early nineties. Who of his generation had not seen the erect figure, with its snow-white kerchief folded across the thin, sloping shoulders, moving in the early forenoon among the produce stalls of the old Sutter Street Market? She bought luxuries, too, this unforgettable creature, about whose faint chocolate features played the shadows cast by a broad black hat of coarsely woven straw. Dustin Huntley's mother had always quivered with suppressed excitement at Selina Parson's approach. To Dustin she would say: "There goes Selina Parsons, the wickedest woman in San Francisco!" But, if another woman happened to be in his mother's company, she would go into more complete, though to Dustin, baffling details. "Yes, would you believe it, something new at my door every day for a month. The most expensive things: cream, squabs, candy, flowers—I can't begin to tell you. . . . Until my father found out. My how he stormed! 'From *Selina Parsons!*' I can hear him, now. And then he turned to the servant: 'The next time that old harridan rings this doorbell, be good enough to inform her that I desire her to cease her attentions to my daughter, do you understand?' . . . What was her object? Well, nothing good, as you can imagine!" How his mother had fluttered and preened as she made this last announcement! She seemed at least two inches taller. And the child at her side formed an impression of Selina

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as a woman who continually went about leaving delicacies from door to door. For no good, it seemed. Though why this should be so had puzzled him. Yet, in the main, his estimate was not far from wrong. Except that he neglected to qualify her questionable generosity. From door to door, of course, was too inclusive. At the doors of houses harboring fresh and charming young ladies would have been more to the point.

Later on, as a young lawyer embarking upon his career, he had run into her time upon time in the legal quarter of the town or among the stock gamblers. There seemed scarcely a lawsuit of prominence that did not feature Selina Parsons as a witness. She knew about everybody, about everything: Mining ventures, divorce scandals, matters of questionable birth, complete family skeletons.

Folks took care not to snub Selina Parsons. Even Dustin Huntley's mother bowed to her, in spite of the heightened color that burned on each cheek. "Not that she knows anything about us," she would explain defensively, "but people like that—it's best to be pleasant to them. One never is sure what they might say! . . . How did we know her? . . . Why, years ago, she was about the only person in San Francisco who could get a family colored help. . . . She brought a young girl to my mother once. A little thief, she turned out to be. First I missed a ring and then a watch. Finally my mother had her earrings stolen. We sent for Selina. The girl denied it. And then what do you suppose Selina did? . . . She took her charge down into the basement, stripped her and beat her with a horsewhip until

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she confessed where the stuff was hidden. The girl had dug a hole and buried everything in the garden. Selina came in triumphantly with the loot. Not a single thing was missing . . . 'Don't worry,' Selina told us, 'she won't do that again in a hurry.' And the child—yes, she was a child—never stole again. She adored Selina. . . . But it makes my flesh creep every time I think of it!" It made Dustin's flesh creep, too. And, as a boy, he trembled when he saw Selina coming. But, when he grew up, it was impossible for him to associate the slightest brutality with the gentle face, smiling with such calm irony under the coarse straw hat. It was even hard for him to associate anything but a scrupulous patrician dignity with her person. Only her faintly dark coloring betrayed her negro blood. Her lips were thin and tight lipped with a Saxon determination, her brow high and wider than her lower face, her nose strong and clean and Roman. And when she walked it was with the erect spring and dignity of breeding. But in her eyes, if you had the good fortune to catch them at close range and unawares, were hidden deep fathomless pools, murky and haunted like a harried thing; eyes in which the jungle and the slave-ship and the human market-place spoke; eyes capable of all gentleness and cruelty and degradation. . . . Yet, even with the testimony of these eyes it was difficult for the young Dustin Huntley to believe all the infamous things that were said of her: a blackmailer, a thief, a procuress—it didn't seem possible!

In the end he had to confess that any or all the rôles she was charged with were possible—some of them were too easy of confirmation to be ignored. A black-

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mailer, a thief in all probability, a procuress, without question. But not in any vulgar sense. She never ordered any one to stand and deliver when she had the goods on him—she merely suggested suavely what the expedient move would be. And when she stole it was more a matter of skillful swindling than petty larceny. Her talents as a procuress never filled the bagnios—she dealt in mistresses, not strumpets. Cast in a slightly different mold she would have played as lascivious an old nurse as any Romeo could have hoped to bribe.

Intimate association with, or even friendliness to, Selina Parsons caused the community to lift its eyebrows—except in the case of Judge Sinclair, and his integrity was so firmly intrenched that people just shrugged and laid his interest in Selina to eccentricity. "Oh, he knew her years ago in New Orleans." "She nursed him through the first smallpox epidemic in San Francisco." "She was once a slave on the Sinclair plantation in Louisiana." These were some of the random explanations which had reached Dustin Huntley. He used to speculate which of these stories held the most grains of truth, whether, perhaps, they were not all potentially true. But on this question the whole Sinclair tribe was either secretive or ignorant. And if Justine Forsythe, the judge's great-niece and inheritor of his estate, knew any more than the world and its wife, she kept a discreet silence.

When Selina Parsons, not five years before, had come into the law offices of Forsythe and Huntley and asked to see Jed Forsythe, even the office boy had been awed. "Tell Mr. Forsythe I want to see him," she had called out impersonally to the staff assembled in the

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anteroom. She was told that Mr. Forsythe was in New York. "How about Mr. Huntley, then?" The girl at the information desk replied: "Mr. Huntley is busy just now." Selina drew herself up sharply. "I didn't ask you-all what he was doing. I asked you to tell him I was here."

Dustin Huntley *was* busy but he saw Selina Parsons immediately. She put her case up to him squarely: "I'm old and tired and need a change. I'd like to go up to the Judge's place on Crystal Lake and live the rest of my life."

"Why do you come here?" Dustin asked, to mark time and hide his amazement.

"Ain't Justine Forsythe come into all that Sinclair money? And ain't her husband your partner and attorney for the estate? . . . I believe in being business-like. Just you present my request to Justine Forsythe. And you might add from me: Judge Sinclair would have granted any favor I asked him. But she knows that as well as I do."

With that she rose and left. Huntley thought the matter over. Should he wait until Jed Forsythe returned from the Atlantic Coast or present Selina's demands to his partner's wife without delay?

He ended by calling a cab and driving out to the old Sinclair mansion on Jackson Street—a redwood house bulging with bay windows in the manner of the seventies. Justine Forsythe was in her bedroom, nursing a cold, the maid told him. He asked to be admitted on the score of pressing business and his request was granted.

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Justine was propped up in a huge walnut bed with medallions carved on its head and base that had been the special pride of her great-uncle. It was one of her whims to keep portions of the old house as near as she could to the comfortable ugliness of the period in which it was built and furnished. Dustin liked her for this. It savored of recognition, if not of actual reverence, for the past, which was becoming rarer and rarer. On the whole, he decided that she had not made a mistake in this particular instance, as her still slender beauty was enhanced by the clumsy massiveness of her background. A lapboard lay in front of her on the old-rose bedspread and she was laying out cards for a game of solitaire. Her face, as she poised a card in mid-air to listen to him, was a curious mixture of charm and shrewdness. It suggested dimly the face of some one whose precise outline for the moment escaped him.

When he had finished delivering Selina's message, she resumed her interrupted game with true Sinclair nonchalance and said:

"What do you advise?"

Dustin Huntley pondered a moment. "From her tone I should say that it would be discreet to grant her request."

Justine Forsythe studied her cards. "Do you mean to say that you base your decision on such an intangible thing as a woman's tone?"

"Scarcely," he corrected. "On Selina Parson's tone. . . . That is quite a different matter."

She snapped a card down on the table. "Do whatever you like. . . . A nigger more or less at Laguna

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Vista won't plunge the estate into bankruptcy. . . . By the way, do you think I made the right play when I threw down that card?"

* * *

From the moment of her arrival at Laguna Vista, Selina Parsons made her presence felt. It had been assumed that she merely intended to drowse away her last days there. But nothing was further from the truth. Before her advent, the big house had been shut up and the estate was running wild under the bloodshot eyes of a drunken caretaker. She wrote to Huntley immediately: "It's a shame to see a place that Washburn Sinclair set such store on going to rack and ruin. Besides, it's eating its head off. Give me some kind of authority and I'll make it support itself." Huntley replied by going up to Crystal Lake in person and having it out with her. To have opposed her would have been impossible, as it would have been foolish. He put her in complete charge and in less than a year her claims were on their way to be justified.

Her energy was unique and marvelous. Never once did she make a false motion. She opened up the big house and put it in readiness for immediate occupation.

"But, Selina," Huntley had protested, "the Forsythes won't be likely to come up here ever again."

"You come, don't you? . . . And I'm here."

"But you don't live in it."

"I like to feel I could," she flashed back, "if I wanted to."

When she talked thus to him she was the mistress of Laguna Vista with all the pride of ownership. Her

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voice, her gesture, her very diction, took on a curious and baffling elegance.

But at the dinner hour she stood behind his chair and served him with a soft deference. This was a different rôle and she played the part with perfect consistency, even to the sliding negro cadences in her voice and the quaint, grammarless phrases hearkening back to her plantation days, which fell from her lips.

A woman of stupendous contradictions, this; a woman who could set with infinite tenderness the leg of a chicken or mercilessly wring the same chicken's neck if occasion required it for the soup-kettle. He knew just how grimly she must have beat the serving child who had stolen his mother's gew-gaws. And he understood, also, why the child adored her. She had a quality of compelling your admiration even in the face of a certain disapproval. Children did not disapprove, of course. Their reactions were much more related and primitive. They feared and worshiped her. That is, Huntley supposed this to be the case. Yet he was conscious that this child with amber eyes that he had stumbled upon at Laguna Vista neither feared nor worshiped. And he was equally certain that Selina would never beat her; because, in his one brief encounter, the child's sense of superiority had communicated itself to him. Selina Parsons could run rough shod over her inferiors but he knew her to be powerless before her betters. She acknowledged few masters, it was true, but when she did her surrender was complete.

In other words the child was well bred. A fact which only increased the mystery of her presence at Laguna Vista. No self-respecting family would give

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Selina Parsons a child to raise. Of that he was positive although he was willing to concede that the infinite variety of Selina was capable of turning out a finished product that might prove astounding.

* * *

Amber eyes were by no means the rule with every one who had Sinclair blood in his veins. It was an inheritance that skipped generations, doubled up in some and strayed casually into others. The judge himself had been free of them, but his only son, Herbert, had borne their imprint, and both his grandchildren. Palmer Sinclair had been reputed dead for ten years, so a child by him seemed far removed from probability. And, of course, Elizabeth was out of the question: Elizabeth, struck down in her first flowering by mysterious complications which a society, still on the borderland of reticence, took good care not to explain. An affection of the kidneys? . . . Perhaps. . . . There had been certain indications and there the matter had rested. Even as late as the final nineties internal maladies of young women were not matters for discussion.

Dustin Huntley himself had shrunk from speculation with all the delicacy of a lover who once had been not without hope. Not without hope and yet scarcely confident. That he had not pressed his suit more ardently had been chargeable more to a sensibility than complete lack of confidence: the prospect of a penniless, junior partner in the law office of Forsythe and Huntley marrying a fortune as large as Elizabeth Sinclair's had smacked of considerable impropriety. Or more particularly, it had seemed unsporting to do anything

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under the circumstances save indicate the direction of his hopes and leave considerable initiative to the lady. At least that had been his feelings in the late nineties as it had been the feelings of most young men of honor in similar situations. The younger generation were not so fastidious. Doubtless they were right, he told himself, as he sat brooding over a sterile past evoked by reminiscence. . . . It was so easy to be too nice and miss the flare that seemed always to be the wage of indiscretion!

It was a bit of irony that his feeling for Elizabeth Sinclair had not taken definite form until after the death of her grandfather. Until then he had accepted her as one of the pleasant facts of existence: a charming girl that one took to cotillions; or accompanied on horseback through Golden Gate Park; or lunched with on the respectable first floor of the old Poodle Dog. This, of course, when she was merely the prospective heiress of the Sinclair millions—ten of them to be exact. But the fortune of a prospective heiress is so much more intangible than the fortune of an heiress in fact. Only an unsophisticated world would have granted him complete sincerity in the face of a ten-million-dollar alliance.

From the cool vantage ground of forty years he wondered whether he had granted *himself* complete sincerity in those first days of budding passion. Had the altered background formed by Elizabeth's virginal mourning weeds subtly thrown a shadow across his self-assurance? Had the world's sneering incredulity at romance in the face of riches communicated itself to him? . . . Perhaps. At any rate, he had dared in-

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sufficiently and lost: to death, as it turned out—an irrevocable thing—which somehow tempered the romantic beggary of it all; did more than that—threw the glamour of the irretrievable about it. Had she been lost to another he could always have thought: "Perhaps it might have been. . . ." As it was, perhaps it still might have been, but only for a brief span. Would that brief span have been disillusioning or would it have increased the heartache? He wondered.

To-day he felt that at forty he would have chanced everything—that, after all, it was only youth that was really cautious, afraid of venturing. At forty, one knew what one could miss. Second blooming it was called—this passionate daring born of slighted joys and undared ecstasies. This from his side.

But what of her—the woman who had died with all the fruits of life untasted? Had she also hungered? . . . He was abroad when she was stricken. On a holiday. Or such had been his excuse for what turned out to be a bleak year of wandering on the continent. Wandering in search of an answer to a deeply hidden question. Had she been tormented by the same question? . . . Doubtless. Perhaps that explained the stories of her long solitary flight to Laguna Vista, just before her death, of the curious, fathomless letters that he had from her at long intervals from that point, of her curious silence as the end drew near. Yes, she must have been tormented. That could be the only explanation. Ah, if she had only made a move! . . . After all, there was something to be said for this younger generation who knew what it wanted and had few reticences in making its wants known from either

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quarter. A youth of to-day would have been undismayed by Elizabeth Sinclair's riches, as she would have been undismayed at giving her lagging lover the proper reassurances. . . . And yet he was too touched with the temper of his day and age to wish for quite the new insolence. Indeed he was so much touched with its temper that he found himself grown suddenly impatient, ashamed if you will, at the circumstance that had called back the pure memory of the woman he had loved and never claimed. A questionable child with amber eyes at Laguna Vista . . . Selina Parsons . . . a flood of tainted back-stair gossip and the faint echo of illicit histories: nice associations truly for the spirit of Elizabeth Sinclair!

The brother, Palmer, was a different matter. One could conceive any irregularity springing from him. A charming wastrel with a flair for misadventure. And amber eyes, unquestionably. His career had supposedly ended in a low dive in Manila run by a half-caste woman of charm, else it had been the easiest trick of imagination to have accounted for Selina Parsons' charge without further ado. It was what one would have expected of him, if one expected anything at all. But the child at Laguna Vista was too young for this accounting. There remained two alternatives—either the little Adrienne sprang from a far-removed Sinclair source; or Selina Parsons was rearing a pretender within the very shadow of the family heritage.

In some respects this last possibility was less fantastic than any of the others. Selina was well versed in the arts of training impostors. The integrity of more than one estate had been rudely shaken by the impudent

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demands of graduates from Selina Parsons' school of prevarication. The famous Fullard case was still clogging the San Francisco courts after twenty years of litigation, claimed by a veritable swarm of alleged illegitimate children, vouched for as genuine by Selina herself in the face of almost damning evidence to the contrary. Yes, assuredly Selina had the capacity for this sort of intrigue, almost a passion for it, if one could trust the court records of the town. There was only one weak point in this explanation. If it were true, what became then of her vaunted friendship for old Judge Sinclair? Selina had at least one virtue—loyalty. And so far she had never been known to betray one whom she accounted a friend. This held for the second and third generation as well as the original recipient of her fealty.

In the end he was baffled by the whole circumstance, and since he could find no reasonable explanation dovetailing with the known facts he drugged his anxiety by assuming that it was all a curious coincidence. This frame of mind induced at least one decision—it relieved him of the necessity of saying anything to the Forsythes about the incident. After all, there was no sense in letting down the bars of intangibilities to a thousand worries. There was every known shade of eye in the Sinclair family and a child with blue or brown or gray eyes at Laguna Vista would not have given him the slightest pause. Why then need a child with amber eyes create disquiet? . . . Why, indeed!

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Chapter Three

EVERY day the horizon expands for Adrienne. Things are different, somehow, since she revealed herself to Mr. Huntley. Mammy had scolded her but in such a perfunctory way that Adrienne guessed her disobedience to be of little consequence. The world of fancy slowly begins to crumble: the world of fact takes its place. Mammy no longer tells wonder tales before the fire. There are other things to talk of: old Judge Sinclair; Mr. Huntley; the Forsythes who own Laguna Vista but never come to it. More and more, Adrienne learns to listen without questioning. For Mammy withdraws turtle-wise if prodded.

There are increasing hours spent in the big house, but the glamour of its enchantment is gone. The pictures in their gilt frames are not bewitched people pressed flatly like flowers between the pages of a book, but portraits of the Sinclair family—portraits of people for the most part dead. There is the judge himself and his sister, Mrs. Howard, who married a gambler, and Mrs. Howard's two daughters, Imogen and Filomena. Imogen died with consumption but Filomena married a poor college professor named Wentworth. Adrienne likes the picture of Mr. Howard. He is a full-lipped creature with a fascinating mustache and burnished hair and his blue eyes twinkle warmly. Adrienne is not sure that she knows what a gambler is but Mammy explains—with a chuckle. A gambler is a man who usu-

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ally loses other people's money. Professor Wentworth, on the other hand, is an unimposing-looking individual with glasses. He was Mrs. Forsythe's father and Adrienne wonders, in the absence of any portrait of Justine Forsythe, whether or not she resembles him. She hopes not. She would so much rather have Justine Forsythe resemble her dashing grandfather Howard.

Hubert Sinclair, the judge's son, has a grave, kindly face without much force but his two children are fascinating. Palmer's hair is tinged with flecks of gold and his eyes and lips and wide, clear brow laugh right out at you. Elizabeth's face is not so merry but it has an audacious expression like a person who can measure a distance swiftly and then cover it in one leap. She is in a gown of ivory-white satin, trimmed with silver, cut very low and a long white veil floats triumphantly from her simply coiffed hair. A bride? No, honey, not a bride. She is in her Court gown. The gown she wore when she was presented at Court, before a King and a Queen, in a great city called London. A real King and Queen. Really, it almost takes your breath away. And the bouquet of flowers in her lap—of yellow roses—well, they are the most beautiful roses you have ever seen anywhere. Mammy says they are just like the Maréchal Niel roses that climb up the second story of the Big House. But Adrienne cannot believe that. They look infinitely more wonderful than real ones.

Adrienne has seen this gown and veil, upon a bed strewn with dresses of stiff brocaded silks which Elizabeth Sinclair wore all during that enchanting London season. Relics of a splendid past that twice a year

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Mammy takes out of chests and closets to air in the sunshine. Heavy gowns that it is difficult for Adrienne's childish strength to lift. But, dead things of no importance at all, it seems to Adrienne, now that the lovely Elizabeth is not here to wear them. It doesn't seem possible that this beautiful lady should be dead—this beautiful lady who had once possessed all the Sinclair millions.

And is Palmer Sinclair dead, too? A youth so alive and smiling. Either dead or gone to the devil is Mammy's inadvertent answer. A bad egg, this Palmer Sinclair. But Adrienne can see that Mammy has an affection for him by the twinkle in her eye when she mentions his name.

There are other portraits of Sinclairs going back before the Judge's time, but these receive only scant attention from Adrienne. Mammy knows their histories but vaguely and, since fancy is gone, Adrienne finds herself more and more craving facts.

So many unguessed treasures are in the big house. A square walnut piano, with yellow keys, that gives out a tinkling sound, for one thing, and row upon row of books in the library, filled with pictures. Presently she will be able to read all these books, Mammy tells her. . . . Adrienne does not know which is the nicer: to have the big house a mysterious thing that one can think of in wonderment or what it actually is—a solid reality.

School continues, under the musty shade of the fig grove, all during the hot summer and before the oak fire when the rain comes on. The "How-many-is-two-and-four" lessons grow harder and harder. But "The-

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apples-are-ripe-in-the-orchard" sort become increasingly easier and full of loveliness. And there is a new one, now—geography. Mammy assumes a great air of importance over this and even Adrienne is impressed. The world is so very big! And round, too, it seems! One can see that very plainly because there is a small world, called a globe, in the library of the big house. And it can whirl about, just as the world is said to do; though why nobody falls off, Adrienne cannot imagine. But that, it appears, is God's affair and not to be inquired into nor worried over. Still, one can't help wondering . . . And it might be thrilling to find oneself suddenly tossed off and darting between the stars like a bee in Mammy's marigold patch.

And there are repeated visits to the Dentons'. Stanley is growing. He becomes freckled and ugly and lacking a tooth. But he respects Adrienne now, because she has a name. Adrienne Ambereyes! He is skeptical, not to say scornful, at first. That is a ridiculous name on the face of it. *Ridiculous!* . . . Well, that shows how little a boy knows! . . . That name was given her by Mr. Huntley and Mr. Huntley has no traffic with anything ridiculous. He is the very nicest man in the *whole* world and he knows *everything!* As much as God? . . . Yes, as much as God! . . . Adrienne is positive and emphatic. . . . Who is Mr. Huntley?—A relation? . . . No, he is *not* a relation! . . . Adrienne is really not quite sure about Mr. Huntley, in spite of Mammy's explanations, but she has learned that it is not safe to admit uncertainty to Stanley Denton. So she says without the slightest hesitation: "Mr.

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Huntley is my godfather." But Stanley's thirst for enlightenment is insatiable. What is a godfather? . . . Really, there is only one way to silence him and that is to adopt an attitude of scorn. "A godfather! Do you mean to say you never heard of a godfather? . . . Hasn't *any one ever* told you a fairy tale?" Of course, even Stanley Denton can't be coerced into admitting such abysmal ignorance and so the embarrassing matter of defining a godfather is dropped.

* * *

The more Adrienne pondered the matter the more convinced she became that Mr. Huntley was a godfather. The people in gilt frames were *not* enchanted, and Mammy was *not* a witch, but Mr. Huntley was a godfather and thus she saved something fanciful from the wreckage of illusion. The sudden way he had popped into her life; the fact that he had named her so readily—weren't these two circumstances sufficient proof? Why, in not one of the fairy stories which Mammy had told her had there been a godfather who ran any truer to form. And, then, if this were not enough, how about the presents he brought each month when he came up from the city? Dolls and knitted silk gloves and even a parasol. After all, nothing could be grander than a parasol. And this parasol in particular . . . of pink silk with row upon row of ruffles. Just the thing to carry when you lifted your skirt with one hand and sang:

"Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!"

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She sang it once for Mr. Huntley and he was so enraptured that he straightway taught her another song. One that went even better with the parasol.

"Pretty Isabella, with a foot like Cinderella,
And a sunshade built for two."

You put out your foot on the first line and let the parasol drop and cover your face on the second. It was too enchanting! And especially with Mr. Huntley to guide you through the entire thing. He smelt so nice, a mixture of scented shaving soap and fragrant cigars and just a dash of faint perfume on his linen handkerchief . . . She was always so sad when he left and so eager for the day when he would arrive again. Indeed, she felt so strangely about it all that one day she said to Mammy: "If you hate to have a person leave and you're just too happy for anything when they come back again what is that the sign of?"

"What do you know about such nonsense, child?" returned Mammy.

"It isn't nonsense," insisted Adrienne gravely. "I want to know."

"Well, if you must know, it's a sign you're in love."

Adrienne's heart leaped. *In love*—with Mr. Huntley. Why hadn't she thought of that before?

"And do you always marry a person you're in love with?"

Mammy chuckled. "Not if you're wise, honey!"

Adrienne decided it wasn't much fun to be wise, anyway. It was much better to be stupid and marry Mr. Huntley when she grew up. He had enough brains for

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both of them, anyway. He *did* know as much as God —*almost!*

* * *

Mammy was right: very soon Adrienne grew old enough to read the books in the library of the big house. Stumbling and picking her way through them and skipping all the big words, but devouring them just the same. . . . Like a clumsy child at a feast she didn't have the skill to pick all the meat off the bones and she left much on her plate and sometimes it was a pretty messy performance but at least she got a taste for reading and she learned flavors. First she did all the books with pictures in them; then those with attractive covers; leaving the sober volumes until the end. Mammy offered neither warning nor suggestion.

One day Mrs. Denton came over to visit. She and Mammy found Adrienne on the porch of the big house with her nose buried deep in a translation of Daudet's *Sapho.* Mrs. Denton was scandalized.

"You don't mean to say you let her read everything!"

Mammy shrugged. "Why not? . . . What she doesn't understand, she won't get."

"They get more at ten than you think."

"If they do they'll be better prepared at twenty, then."

"Nonsense! . . . I didn't read books like that until I was married. And I reckon I was prepared enough."

"And I never read them at all!" snapped back Mammy. "But that didn't keep me from thinking about things. . . ."

As they sauntered off to look at Mammy's latest

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brood of young turkeys Adrienne heard snatches of a prolonged argument. In effect, she learned that the book she was reading was what Mrs. Denton called a bad book. And she gathered that all French books were bad. She knew *Sapho* was a French book because on the first page read the legend: Translated from the French. It had puzzled her for a long time until Mammy had explained just what it meant. She finished *Sapho* that very afternoon but she voted it very dull.

Only one thing in the entire book impressed her and that was Sapho's remark to her lover: "At twelve years there was nothing more for me to learn."

That night she said to Mammy: "How long before I'm twelve?"

"In two years."

In two years! . . . In two years she would know everything! That was a thrilling thought. . . . The next day she took down another volume Translated from the French: Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo.* She understood nearly all of this. But it took her two weeks to read it. And how she cried at night over it! In the end, she thought that the Count was horrid. He needn't have been quite so disagreeable! But the fact that this book was so clear to her when *Sapho* meant nothing at all puzzled her. Could one grow to be twelve in two weeks?

Again she went questioningly to Mammy. "I couldn't possibly be twelve years old, could I?"

"Why, honey-child, you know well enough you just had a birthday last month."

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"But I thought maybe twelve might come on all of a sudden-like."

Mammy shook her head.

Next day Adrienne picked up *Sapho* again. No, she didn't understand it. Mammy was right: she was still ten, going on eleven.

But for a long time she read only books *Translated from the French* . . . Sometimes she understood them and sometimes she didn't. She decided that the books she didn't understand were bad books, because she had Mrs. Denton's word that *Sapho* was a bad book and she hadn't understood that. . . .

Well, the only thing to do was to wait until you were twelve. So whenever she began a book that didn't promise to be illuminating she put it back on the shelves and went on to the next.

After she was twelve she would understand these bad books. And, in spite of the fact that the good books were often as diverting as one could possibly imagine, there was a delicious anticipation in the fact that there were so many bad books returned to the shelves against the day of wisdom.

* * *

When Adrienne was fourteen she fell in love again. This time with a German, Karl Stralendorf, who came to Laguna Vista to do over the gardens in front of the big house and incidentally ward off a threatened physical breakdown. Only in fairy tales had she ever heard of such a creature, with his hair of finely spun gold and white, clear skin, touched with a hectic pink when

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he grew too ambitious. Mammy didn't altogether approve of him, at first. He had been sent up by Justine Forsythe and there was a suspicion that he came to snoop, as Mammy put it. But nothing was further from the truth. He set to work and drew plans which he colored with a tiny brush and water colors. Adrienne had hard work to believe that the area between the big house and the lake could ever be made to look so captivating and she expressed her doubts.

"Oh, not all at once, Fräulein," he remonstrated in his precise manner. "The trees must grow, remember. But in three years you shall see."

In three years! . . . Why, she would be seventeen, then, a young lady! . . . Would he stay on for three years? . . . Her heart pounded as she asked the question. He answered gravely: "That is what I plan, now."

One day *his* library appeared, packed in a half-dozen cases, and volume after volume of bound music. A piano tuner came over from Lakeview and he strummed all day on the yellow keys of the square piano and that night they had music. . . . Such music! . . . Adrienne sat spellbound. It shook her so that she could not sleep. For two solid weeks, every night they had music, until Mr. Huntley blew up from San Francisco and all this enchanting activity came temporarily to a standstill. Instead, after supper the two men wandered about in the twilight waving their walking sticks in the dusk as they illustrated the points they made with respect to the new garden plans . . . Adrienne was disconsolate. And, suddenly, she hated Mr. Huntley.

Her unhappiness moved her to tears. She went off

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by herself down the star-lit stretch of beach and wept passionately. After this tempest she felt ashamed; not of her tears, but of her injustice to Mr. Huntley. But, suddenly, she had outgrown the dolls, and the knitted gloves, and the pink silk parasol with row upon row of ruffles. Even "Tassels on My Boots" lost its savor and "Pretty Isabella." Karl's music had done something to her.

Next morning Mr. Huntley said to her: "And how does little Ambereyes like Karl Stralendorf?" pinching her cheek as he said it. An unpleasant flush spread itself over her neck and face and forehead. She heard Mr. Huntley laugh. "Ah, I can see I have a rival!" And when he had quite done teasing her he took a box from his coat pocket. She opened it upon a necklace of deep-blue crystal beads. They were lovely, of course, and she adored them, but the thought flashed over her: "But they're not as lovely as Karl's music."

* * *

Huntley left that night and Adrienne felt a sharp relief. But Karl did not touch the piano for a week. He was feverishly drawing plans all over again. Adrienne listened while he explained the changes to Mammy. "I did not realize how much variety I could get into the foliage. Mr. Huntley tells me orange trees can be made to grow up here . . . And I've decided on plenty of magnolia. Mrs. Forsythe likes so well heavy-scented blossoms. And the golden oranges against the dark-green background: that will be gorgeous, eh? Then, we shall plant row upon row of oleander and camellias and Japanese quince."

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Mammy said, "Why all this sudden interest in Laguna Vista? It would have gone to the dogs long ago if Justine Forsythe had had her way."

Karl smiled, half wanly, half gayly. "Invalids like me must have something to do—is it not so? . . . And people with money—they like to amuse themselves and feel virtuous at the same time."

Adrienne listened with mild curiosity to what he said, but the *way* he said things always entranced her. He shot out his words with such sharp precision, giving the most unimportant a sound value quite out of keeping with its humble estate. It was so different from Mammy's soft, slurring manner of speech.

When he played the piano again, Adrienne once more sat spellbound. Apparently he had been too absorbed, previously, to notice her quiet rapture but, this time, in a soft passage, an audible sigh, long-drawn and ecstatic, escaped her.

Stralendorf turned. "Ah, Fräulein, you like it, eh?"

She nodded back; tears stood tremulously near the welling point and if she had spoken she would have wept. But she fancied that he must have seen the moisture glistening on her eyelashes, even in the gloom, and she felt ashamed.

She was sure of it, later, when Mammy came in to herd her back to the cottage and bed. She went out ahead, standing in the hall, waiting for Mammy to follow.

"The little Fräulein," she heard Stralendorf say, "she has a soul! . . . To-night she wept at my music!"

"That's only natural," was Mammy's reply. "Her father was a musician."

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Adrienne's heart warmed and grew chill in turn. *Her father!* He played the piano, like Mr. Stralendorf —like Karl! She must ask Mammy all about him. But when she got to her room something warned her to keep silent. . . . If Mammy meant her to hear, she would have said it openly, before everybody.

* * *

The actual tree-planting, in accordance with Karl's new plans, could not begin until after the first rains. They had hoped for a good storm in October, followed by the soft encouragement of reasonably warm weather, so that the shrubs could get acclimated before the frosty weather came. But the usual midsummer drought was prolonged into December. The hills and woods, dried to tinder, blazed up in sullen thirsty wrath. Hardly a day passed when a fresh line of smoke did not curl heavenward, proclaiming a fresh outbreak. The situation grew serious. If things kept on this way, there might come a time when even Laguna Vista might be threatened. A remote, almost fantastic contingency, but possible nevertheless. Watching the increasing circle of flame licking up the timber, even Mammy, habitually self-contained, became apprehensive. There began to be speculation as to what would be the best move to make in case the fire came within threatening distance. Then, over night, the situation lifted. A storm blew up from the southeast, rain fell in slantwise fury. The downpour kept up for three days. When it cleared Stralendorf plunged into an orgy of work. His energy was marvelous. Every male on the estate was pressed into service. Scores of plants sent up from San

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Francisco were set out. Adrienne could scarcely keep her mind on her lessons there was such a frenzy of activity in the air. Within three days of Christmas the final spadeful of earth was thrown on the last shrub. Karl shrugged with satisfaction and looked at the calendar.

"What!" he cried, "the twenty-second of December . . Well, we must think now of Christmas! Is it not so?"

Adrienne was puzzled. Preparations for Christmas. That was a new idea. Heretofore Christmas had been only a vague thing that Mammy had noted merely in passing. Indeed, Adrienne hardly knew its significance. Karl Stralendorf was scandalized at her ignorance. What! She had never had a Christmas tree? . . . Or sung carols? . . . Or lit candles at nightfall?

Well, it appeared all that was to be changed. First, they started off early next morning in quest of a tree. . . . Clear up above the oaks and madrones they found a fir tree slender, silver trunked and prim. Karl laid on mightily with an ax. It shuddered and toppled over with a little crackle that sounded for all the world like a breaking heart. Adrienne looked solemn. She had never seen a tree felled before. Karl sensed her distress. "Don't worry, Fräulein!" he said reassuringly. "It will forget all about its pain once it is all dressed up. . . . Ach, so grand, like a princess! . . . You shall see!"

They trailed back with their bruised quarry. Karl sang and whistled and yodeled in sheer joy, but Adrienne remained stubbornly sad. It was a veiled day,

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soft and warm, yet without luminous sunlight. At intervals Karl stopped to gather red toyon berries or cut off great bunches of fruiting madrone. Once he climbed up into a great oak and brought down a huge bunch of mistletoe. "And do you know what we shall do with this, Fräulein? . . . No? . . . Why, hang it up, of course! . . . And then what? Why, I shall kiss the first pretty girl who stands under it."

The first pretty girl! Adrienne pondered this phrase all the way home. Where would she come from, this pretty girl that Karl seemed so confident would stand under the mistletoe? . . . And be kissed by him! . . . It didn't sound quite nice, somehow.

"Ah, do not be so solemn, Fräulein! . . . In two days, just think in two days it will be Christmas—the day that Christ was born, fancy that, Fräulein!"

* * *

It appeared that a trip to Lakeview would have to be made if Christmas was to be all Karl expected of it. There were quantities of things needed for the tree and then a feast was being planned besides. Adrienne thrilled to the knowledge that she was to go along with Karl on this fresh quest. Only once had she ever been in to the village and, then, she had felt disappointed in it. It seemed very drab and ugly and sprawling with only one note of gayety: a gilt cross upon the Catholic church which glinted in the sunlight. But, under the spell of all the present excitement, she felt that perhaps this time she would find it more interesting. They set out at ten o'clock in a small motor-boat with Karl at

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the wheel. A biting north wind had sprung up in the night, whipping the sky clear of haze and murk. In the harsh sunlight Karl's cheeks seemed sunken and his mouth pinched and worn. "He's been working too hard," thought Adrienne gravely and suddenly her first maternal pang was born. He was not in a singing mood, either, this morning, but he drew the collar of his mackinaw up over his ears and steered in huddled silence.

They reached Lakeview shortly before noon. The wind here was less keen and Karl's spirits revived. . . . By the time they had finished with their purchases he was quite his gay self again. Adrienne felt happy, too. The town was just as ugly as she had remembered it. She expressed her disappointment to Karl.

"Ah, Fräulein," he returned, "but in my country, now, a village is something to look at. It is old, for one thing. . . . Yes, that is the secret—age."

She did not quite understand that. Old people were not beautiful, nor an old dress. Why, then, should age make a village or a city lovely?

Their purchases quite filled their tiny motor-boat. All sorts of glass ornaments and tinsel for the tree and no end of outrageously extravagant things for the feast. . . . When they got home they found that Mammy had set the tree up in the great room of the big house. The joy of trimming it began. Adrienne had never imagined anything so diverting. Even Mammy caught the spirit of the occasion. She began to tell about Christmas long ago in the old plantation where she had once lived. "A blazing plum pudding just soaked in brandy, for one thing!" she chuckled. "And all

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Their purchases quite filled their tiny motor-boat. All sorts of glass ornaments and tinsel for the tree and no end of outrageously extravagant things for the feast. . . . When they got home they found that Mammy had set the tree up in the great room of the big house. The joy of trimming it began. Adrienne had never imagined anything so diverting. Even Mammy caught the spirit of the occasion. She began to tell about Christmas long ago in the old plantation where she had once lived. "A blazing plum pudding just soaked in brandy, for one thing!" she chuckled. "And after

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dinner an eggnog that would knock any of this generation cold. . . . They *certainly* could hold their liquor in those days!" Then came a picture of Christmas morning, with the mistress, standing on the wide steps leading down from the veranda, distributing presents to the darkies filing past to receive them. Karl began to ask questions in that naïve foreign manner that was so hard to escape. *A plantation in Louisiana* —and what was Mammy doing there? What part did she play? She drew herself back for a moment as if undecided what to reply and then she said quite simply: "I was a slave, like the rest of them." Ah, yes! Karl understood at once: a slave that Mr. Lincoln freed, was it not so? . . . No, it was not so . . . that is, not in Mammy's case. "It didn't take Mr. Lincoln to free me," Mammy returned with a glint of pride. "My master did that himself when I was eighteen." So? . . . And how did that come about? But to this question Mammy returned a cryptic, "There were reasons," and, Karl, realizing that he had been indiscreet, began to beg advice about the proper place to hang the particular glass ornament that was engaging his attention at that moment.

Later, Mammy relented, and she reminisced again. This time it concerned Christmas eve in the convent where she had gone to serve the nuns soon after her release from slavery. "I went to New Orleans," she said, "looking for work. Some one told me that the nuns in the Saint Ursula Convent wanted a woman to scrub floors . . . I went out that night and the Mother Superior questioned me. 'Was I a Catholic?' I answered right back, 'Yes.' Before the week was out

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they found out that I had lied. But they kept me on and taught me everything. And they almost got me. That's of course what they counted on. Up to the last minute they thought I'd turn . . . The only time in my life I ever felt mean was when I disappointed them. . . . One night I made up my mind I couldn't learn anything more from them and so I packed my things and left without a word. . . . That's what I've done all my life—washed my hands of folks that didn't have nothing more to give me."

She said this last half defiantly, half sorrowfully. Karl looked at her reprovingly and Adrienne felt a sharp pang of disappointment. It was far better, she decided, for people not to talk about themselves. When they were silent you could imagine such lovely things about them.

* * *

Mammy somehow had fancied that the Christmas feast was to be just for three: Karl, Adrienne, and herself, but Karl soon put an end to that notion. His idea was to have everybody—all the ranch hands and even the Dentons if they would come. His enthusiasm rushed Mammy off her feet though it was plain that she didn't wholly approve of this folly. The ranch hands were something Mammy had always held herself aloof from. . . . They dispatched the hairy-chested Joe to the Dentons with the invitation. He returned with an acceptance.

Christmas eve found Adrienne quivering with excitement. Only in stories and books had she ever encountered such a thing as a celebration. They set the

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table in the old dining-room of the big house. It had ivory white walls whose only decorations were stuffed bodies of grouse and quail set cunningly into deep frames—game trophies of the Judge's hunting days. Karl draped garlands of oak leaves from frame to frame and massed the corners of the room with branches of blue-green eucalyptus seared with flame wherever the frost had touched it. At six o'clock the ranch hands began to file in—shy and awkward with their faces scrubbed to a high and dangerous polish, smelling of bay rum and cheap soap. There was Joe, of course, who was one of Adrienne's first sour-smelling memories; and old Ferguson, a dour Scot with a taste for strong tobacco; and Felix, a Basque who knew things about sheep; and Carlborg, a young, clean-limbed Swede. Karl, who had scolded and hectored and even cursed this quartette all through the press of tree-planting, was as mild and smiling as an April day, but they held aloof and shuffled uneasily on first one foot and then another. Karl went out to the pantry and returned with glasses on a tray and a bottle in his hand. The quartette brightened visibly, poured themselves drinks, tossed them off in a lip-smacking gulp and suddenly began to indulge in throaty chatter. . . . Guffaws followed . . . sly jokes . . . fragments of a shattered song. The Dentons arrived. Mrs. Denton was uppish at the sight of conviviality and fled into the kitchen with Mammy, herding Stanley before her. Denton remained with the men and grew red faced and argumentative. He was a man lean of chest and lean of wrist and lean of thigh; hung together loosely. Adrienne had never seen him before and she did not

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like him. The noise and animal heat and murky laughter made her feel uneasy. Mammy called her. "Better come in here with us, honey," she said. But Adrienne didn't want to go into the kitchen where Stanley was. She was in no mood for his eternal and nagging questions. She chose to retire to the great room bathed in the half-light of an oak fire. A fragrant peace was over everything. In the center stood the Christmas-tree, quite recovered, it seemed, from its hurt as Karl had predicted, waiting the hour of its triumph. The glow from the fire endowed it with a thousand winking eyes of glass and tinsel. Adrienne stopped before the long gilt mirror and preened herself with naïve and unconscious pleasure. She was dressed in a quince-colored frock that Mammy had made for her, very soft and clinging, with long streamers of black velvet held in place by velvet rosettes, flowing from the high waistline. Her brown hair, light almost to the point of being tawny, fell in half-curled splendor about her shoulders. But the great triumph was a wreath of golden oak leaves which Karl had woven and gilded for her. It was like the crown of a princess. . . . It had taken her hours to dress and she had been a little disappointed at the effect of all this grandeur on the company. Mammy was too busy in the kitchen to give her more than perfunctory notice and Mrs. Denton had merely thrown her an amused glance. The ranch hands hadn't mattered, but Karl might have noticed, she thought. But her own personal satisfaction in the effect she was conscious of creating outweighed all that. She moved back and forth in front of the mirror—the reflection opposite her lit to a

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flickering eerieness puzzled and eluded her. Was it really she, Adrienne Ambereyes, floating through the intangibilities of that gilt mirror? Who was she? . . . Who was anybody? . . . Momentarily she lost a sense of ego. She recovered, frightened. It was as if she had hurled herself into space and come back to the great room in an eye's twinkling.

She withdrew cautiously and went over and sat down on the rug before the fire. This was mysterious, too, but in a comfortable, glowing way. It took her back to those first days of dim perceptions with Mammy telling her wonder tales in the wintry twilight. How old was she then? . . . three? . . . four? . . . five? . . . Now, she was fourteen. Did she know everything, yet? . . . She was changing, she knew that. . . . Tears came to her eyes, now, when she least expected them. Before, she had cried for definite things. Now, a chord struck on the piano by Karl was enough to fill her eyes. Or the way he said: "The day that Christ was born; fancy that, Fräulein!" . . . Christ . . . she wondered. It had a hard sound, this word, like something flashing. Jesus . . . that was better, softer, more like a child . . . more like a child born in a manger. . . . Karl had told her this . . . the whole story . . . because there was no room at the inn. . . . It seemed strange that Mammy had never spoken of this, she who was always so full of tales. . . .

From the walls the Sinclairs looked down on her . . . particularly Elizabeth with her challenging eyes. Elizabeth in ivory satin and white veil that was not the ivory satin nor white veil of a bride. Dead! Could it be possible—this creature who seemed, even in the

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confines of a gilt frame, to be so alive, so vital? . . . Because there was no room at the inn. Were children usually born in inns? Take herself for example. She must ask.

"And what is the princess dreaming about?" Ah, there is Karl standing in the doorway. "It is all ready, Fräulein! . . . In a moment we shall sit down."

* * *

Finally every one is seated at the long table except Mammy. Karl, who has not counted on this, protests, but Mammy is firm with a sort of fierce dignity that has a note of contempt in it. "Some one must serve!" she insists severely . . . The eating begins. Adrienne never has seen such gorging. The men eat and eat, while their faces grow more and more scarlet. Mrs. Denton is not far behind. "It's good to eat something you don't have to cook yourself!" she flings out generally at the company and specifically at Mr. Denton who is too comfortable to be pricked by covert disparagements. . . . There is red and white wine from the Asti colony in flaring bottles encased in straw, and cognac for the coffee, and brandy leaping bluely over the plum pudding.

Mrs. Denton will have none of anything to drink and there is something caustic and disagreeable in her refusal. She is not one, she assures them, who needs liquor to lift her spirits. Karl's reply is half laughing, half serious. "Ah, madam, you are to be envied; life does not use us all so gently . . . I mean we must be helped over some of the rough places . . . is it not so?" The men nod their approval of this remark with-

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out quite catching its half tones. At the end of the dinner Karl produces a narrow stone jug with a handle from which he pours a thick orange liquid into tiny, thimble-like glasses. "For the ladies!" he explains. But again Mrs. Denton is obdurate. Adrienne receives one, and Mammy, standing behind Karl with a silver tray in her hands. One can see that Mrs. Denton is scandalized. "Not Adrienne!" she cries, as Karl indicates the glass he wishes passed. Adrienne puts her lips daintily to the glass's rim. It tastes like nothing she has ever drunk in her life. It is a fairy mixture that warms you deliciously. A love potion, perhaps. She has just finished reading the story of Tristan and Isolde in a book that Karl had loaned her and a love potion is a very real thing. . . . She catches sight of Mammy sipping at her glass. At once the illusion is shattered—Karl scarcely would feed Mammy a love potion. . . . But, even so, it is a heavenly drink. As usual Adrienne has the capacity for saving something precious from the wreck of fancy.

"Cannot the boy have one—a drink of liqueur, I mean?" Mrs. Denton snorts back a refusal. Stanley throws his mother a sullen look. Curious, but this is the first time Adrienne has been conscious of Stanley's presence, compared to Karl he is lank and shambling and homely. A boy at the silent age. Even to the immature perceptions of Adrienne he gives out a suggestion of something unfathomable—a tide ready to turn in any direction. The company scrape back their chairs.

"Now, for the Christmas tree!" cries Karl.

* * *

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At the general store in Lakeview, the clerk in charge had tried to sell Karl electrical wiring, studded with tiny lights, for the tree, but to no purpose . . .

"Christmas without candles!" Karl had cried out, scandalized.

But the clerk had not learned a salesmanship lesson for the purpose of abandoning it to the first dissenter. "Electric lights," he had returned with authority, "are permanent, safer and more economical!"

"*So?* . . . but are they more beautiful?"

"There is absolutely no flickering. An electric light never goes out."

"How terrible! . . . We shall not have electric lights then."

And so the protesting clerk had been compelled to rout out some forgotten candles among the litter of abandoned stock. Now, Adrienne is helping Karl to light them while the company wait in the dining-room for the signal to enter.

"We shall begin at the top, Fräulein! . . . See, the top candle just over the Star of Bethlehem: you shall light that one because that is a great privilege!"

Adrienne lights it, holding her breath. . . .

How does Karl manage to invest the slightest incident with so much charm? . . . Mammy would have given directions or done the thing herself without comment . . . *just over the Star of Bethlehem: you shall light that one, Fräulein.* He made it a great privilege.

Finally they are all lighted. . . . Adrienne stands before the glittering wonder of it, her lips slightly parted, the glowing taper which she has used to reach the topmost branches standing upright in her hand.

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"Ach, Fräulein, how beautiful you are . . . like a fairy with a magic wand! . . . Yes, you are a fairy with a magic wand and you have just waved that wand on something dark and dreary and, behold, it is quivering with light. . . . You must always do that, Fräulein . . . light up the darkness!"

She can feel the color mounting to her lips, her cheeks, her forehead. All those hours before the mirror, dressing; no, they have not been wasted. She steps back and quickly Karl seizes and kisses her.

"Ah, Fräulein, if you *must* stand under the mistletoe!"

She recovers from her confusion . . . a confusion that is almost fright. . . . She had forgotten about that first pretty girl under the mistletoe whom Karl had threatened to kiss.

The company have crowded in—the men look pleased and sheepish in turn. Carlborg, the Swede, wipes something suspiciously like a tear from his eye.

The first person to speak is Mrs. Denton. "Oh, candles!" is her brief but caustic comment. One knows just what she is thinking, just all she has implied in these two words. With the sharpness of a rifle shot she has destroyed a beautiful moment.

"Yes, candles, madam."

Thus simply does Karl reassemble the shattered fragments.

* * *

In her room, after everything is very still, Adrienne gets up to look at her presents. This is the only real Christmas she has ever known and the wonder of it

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moves her to strange ecstasy tinged with the first fear she has had in the presence of happiness. Can one go on being happy forever? . . . She does not know, she merely asks the question. . . . First she opens the box from Mr. Huntley. What made him remember that it was Christmas? . . . He has never thought of it before. A complete toilet set for her bureau, ivory white, in an adorable case lined with old-rose silk. Mr. Huntley. . . . She had almost forgotten him. And once she had claimed him for her godfather and thought him the wisest man in the whole world and quite the nicest! She feels a little ashamed of her inconstancy. . . . Well, for that matter, he is her godfather, still. She decides to grant him that privilege. She must write a letter and thank him and ask him when he is coming up to Laguna Vista again. It isn't as if she had forgotten him but he has ceased to be an event: he has been relegated to the status of accepted things. . . . The handkerchief from Mrs. Denton doesn't matter in the least, only she wishes that Mrs. Denton hadn't gone to the trouble. She doesn't like Mrs. Denton. Her manner of saying things is much too sharp. Fancy what she heard her remark to Mammy about her beautiful dress and the crown of gilded oak leaves: "All them gewgaws . . . I may be wrong, I usually am, but a girl just turned fourteen . . . well, I like things simpler. . . . And why, I should like to know, does a man go to all that crown nonsense? . . . Gilding oak leaves. . . . Bosh! . . . You'd better look sharp!"

Mammy's reply had been just right: "What, Mr. Stralendorf! . . . You can trust his sort . . . don't worry about that."

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Just what had it all meant? . . .

All the hired men had brought her something, too. Quite unexpectedly after Karl had finished distributing the gifts they had jointly and severally begun to dive into their trouser pockets, advancing sheepishly to where she was sitting enthroned in happiness, to lay their tributes at her feet. Joe produced a gaudy purse which swung on a gilt chain; Ferguson, a tiny gold thimble; Felix, the Basque shepherd, a lovely little napkin ring which he had carved from a bit of manzanita; and Carlborg, some shoe-buckles, dainty and flashing, that had once belonged to his Swedish grandmother. . . . She had wanted to burst into those strangely ready tears at that moment, but pride gave her dignity instead. . . . To fancy these four humble men, whom she had scarcely ever noticed, doing this for her! . . . But that was what Christmas was, if one could believe Karl. . . .

Stanley Denton, too, had something for her—a belt made from the skin of a rattlesnake, which he had cured himself. She accepted it, shuddering. . . . And yet it was beautiful when she overcame her first recoil and studied it.

And, lastly, Karl's gift—a ring, the first ring she had ever owned—gold inlaid with crude, uneven pearls, a strange soft gold.

"I never seen a ring like that, before!" had been Mrs. Denton's dubious comment.

"It is Chinese, madam," Karl had explained with the terse politeness he always reserved for Mrs. Denton. Then to Adrienne: "I found it in a jeweler's shop in San Francisco's Chinatown. It was too small, of

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course. . . . But I bought it because I liked it. . . . You see, it was for you all the time, Fräulein. Only, then, I did not know."

No, there was nobody in the whole world quite like Karl. Not as wise perhaps as Mr. Huntley, nor as capable as Mammy, but— It was no use: Karl was just Karl. Definitions in his case meant nothing.

* * *

The next morning Karl was ill. He breathed hard and he had a temperature. Mammy sent Joe in to Lakeview for the doctor. The doctor looked grave. "Threatened with pneumonia," he said. "He'll need careful nursing." In spite of her terror, Adrienne felt her heart leap. The prospect of nursing Karl was too wonderful! . . . The plain truth of the matter was that Karl was quite worn out with the tree planting and Christmas. What he needed more than anything else was rest.

"Have you ever had a hemorrhage?" asked the doctor, prodding Karl's chest.

Karl smiled back wanly. "No, I came here to California to miss that. . . . If you want my complete history I've got it tucked away somewhere in my trunk. . . . I'm not tubercular—yet . . . just threatened with it . . . Is it not droll?—all my life I have been just threatened with things. But—how do you say it in America?—I never quite make the grade."

But for Karl to be *threatened* with a disease proved no small matter. For days he lay ill, very ill. No, he didn't exactly have pneumonia, the doctor said, but Mammy declared he might just as well have had it.

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Adrienne was frightened but faithful. . . . She would sit for hours, like a little gray mouse, in the corner of the sick-room, ready to spring into action at the slightest provocation. . . . She used to dream how glorious it would be to spend an entire life, thus, waiting on Karl. She yearned for self-sacrifice, she wanted hard tasks. All the softness of the Christmas holidays was swallowed up in the black pall of Karl's indisposition. Karl dozed and tossed and grew fretful. . . . Sometimes he was even cross with Adrienne. These moments thrilled her. She loved to take his ill-temper with proper humility. . . . Mammy came in and drove her a hundred times a day into the open. "Honey-child," she would say, lapsing into the quaint, grammarless phrases she affected in her tender moments, "what for you stick so close indoors? . . . That Karl-man don't need you hanging round. You clear out, now, and run on the hills a while."

But the hills had lost their glamour . . . even the cool gold of the first buttercups could not tempt Adrienne beyond a perfunctory truancy. Mammy gave up, after a while. "What can you expect from a chile that's got contrary blood in her?" she demanded. Adrienne made no reply. She was old enough, now, to realize that a mystery lay back of her origin and Mammy's tone touched on the matter slightingly. *Contrary blood!* Something sullen crept into Adrienne's heart for the first time. But her sick-room vigil soon cleansed her of resentment.

The days of convalescence were gayer. . . . She read to Karl by the hour . . . or he told her stories of his life in Munich. He had been everywhere—to London

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and Paris. And Italy, he adored Italy, but more particularly Spain. Ah, the neglected gardens of Spain! Not cold and austere like the Italians' gardens but rioting with color and bloom. . . . That's what he was planning for Laguna Vista. A Spanish garden? . . . No, not quite that—one should only transplant the feeling, never the complete idea. A Spanish garden even in California would be stupid. But a warm, glowing garden—that was different!

She felt what he meant without quite grasping it. Presently, they talked of plans for the future. "I shall teach you the piano, Fräulein . . . and how to sketch. . . . And some day I shall try my hand at oils and paint your picture . . . in the quince-colored dress you wore at Christmas."

"And my crown, too?" she cried.

"If you still have it."

If she still had it! . . . Why, she would have that always—*forever!*

And thus January passed until one day a letter came from San Francisco.

"Mrs. Forsythe has heard that I have been sick. . . . She wants me to come down to San Francisco for a holiday. . . . That will be fine."

"How—how long will you stay?"

"Ah, let me see—she says at least a month."

A month! . . . Adrienne felt sick.

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Chapter Four

FEBRUARY . . . half of March gone. . . . Karl was still in San Francisco visiting the Forsythes and Adrienne disconsolate. Mammy noticed it. "Honey-child, you just better quit your moping round like a sick chicken. . . . We got along before without this Karl-man."

Mammy's observations were touched faintly with ridicule. . . . Adrienne assumed cheerfulness.

At last a letter came. He would be home on Sunday the eighteenth. Adrienne counted the days . . . the hours . . . the minutes . . . But his arrival was fraught with bitter disappointment.

He looked well for one thing, almost robust, and Adrienne had been accustomed to a wan, wistful Karl. Then his greeting was casual, as if he had returned from Lakeview for the day. Adrienne did not weep, now. She went to her room and sulked. At seven o'clock Mammy came over from the Big House where she had gone to prepare Karl's dinner, and she said: "That Karl-man wants you to come over and hear all about his trip." But Adrienne was haughty. She hadn't the least curiosity about anybody's trip, least of all Karl Stralendorf's. And besides she had a headache. She knew from Mammy's wide smile that the truth had been guessed. She hated Mammy . . . she hated Karl . . . she hated herself. . . .

But when morning came she went over to the big house to find Karl out on the porch, sketching. He

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did not lift his eyes at her approach. Her heart beat fast. She circled around him and peered over his shoulder. He was drawing a woman's head. Finally she could stand it no longer.

"Whose picture is that?" she asked.

"That," he said, with his usual precision, "is Mrs. Forsythe."

"Is she pretty?"

"She has been."

"Is she old?"

"About forty."

"And she isn't pretty?"

"No . . . better than that—she's handsome."

"I've always wondered about Mrs. Forsythe."

"So?"

"Yes. . . . Do you suppose she will ever come up here?"

"Some day. . . . When the garden is complete. . . . She hates uncivilized things. She likes comforts . . . backgrounds . . . luxury . . . She says she hates the wilderness. . . . When I can promise her green lawns to the water's edge, and dustless walks, and gay awnings, she will come, but not before."

"I shan't like her!" Adrienne suddenly burst forth. "I don't like fussy people."

"So?"

"Besides, there will never be anything more beautiful than the fig grove. . . . No garden that *any one* will plant can ever be more beautiful than that."

This time Karl lifted his glance. The look he threw at her was full of amused tolerance. "You are quite right, Fräulein. . . . But is there anything to prevent

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us from trying? . . . One beautiful thing should lead to another." He stopped again to measure her while she flushed under the gentleness of his rebuke. "Fräulein, how you have changed! . . . In two months you have changed! . . . Why, before we know it you will be grown up—a young lady! . . . Tell me, what have you been doing?"

Suddenly she grew sullen. "Nothing!"

Karl went on touching up the sketch of Justine Forsythe. Mammy came out of the big house and began to water some potted ferns on a table in a corner of the porch.

Finally Karl said: "I was telling Mrs. Forsythe about you. . . . You should have seen how interested she was." Mammy stopped tilting the watering-pot, to listen. "She said, 'Funny, I never heard about her . . . I'll have to ask Mr. Huntley.' "

Mammy went on pouring water over the ferns. "*Did* she—ask Mr. Huntley, I mean?"

"At once . . . 'Who is this Adrienne Some-body-or-other at Laguna Vista?' . . . That's how she said it: *Adrienne Some-body-or-other.*" Karl laughed, full of the quaint joy that one, not to the language born, feels at achieving a bit of racy colloquialism.

"And what did Mr. Huntley say to that?" asked Mammy.

"He just shrugged. 'You mean Adrienne Parsons? Why, she—' "

"Adrienne *Parsons!*" broke in Adrienne. "Mr. Huntley knows that isn't my name! . . ."

"So?"

Mammy came suavely to the rescue. "They have a

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joke, these two: Mr. Huntley and Adrienne. . . . He calls her Adrienne Ambereyes."

Karl's face lit up with approval. "Fancy Huntley calling her that! . . . I did not know he had it in him. . . . Adrienne Ambereyes! . . . Capital!"

Mammy dashed the remaining drops of moisture remaining in the watering-pot upon the veranda floor. Then she went back into the house. Adrienne sat white and staring. Suddenly, she was swamped by the doubts and uncertainties and fears that had been kept at bay by an invulnerable simplicity. In a flash she knew things, knew things with the unerring precision that instinct gives to childhood trembling on the brink of a graver estate. She felt humiliated, humiliated before Karl. To be called Parsons when that was not her name—when that couldn't be her name! . . . She knew why she didn't have a name! And she didn't care! . . . She didn't care! . . . No, she didn't even care if Karl guessed it!

"My name isn't Parsons!" she cried passionately. "That's Mammy's name. . . . How could we both have the same name? . . . It's ridiculous!"

"A name does not matter, Fräulein! . . . A name does not matter in the least!" He went on making quick strokes with his brush as if he were a little uncertain what next to say to her. Then he shot out in triumph. "A name does not matter to a young lady because she changes it anyway. . . . So soon she changes it! When she gets married she—"

"All young ladies don't get married."

"If you mean old maids—"

"I don't mean old maids," said Adrienne calmly.

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He drew back and looked at her quizzically. "Ach, Fräulein, what do you know about such things? . . . You read too many books, eh? . . . That is not good. . . . A woman who does not get married is not nice."

"That isn't so!" she cried with childish passion. "My mother was nice—she must have been!"

"Of course, Fräulein! . . . your mother . . . everybody's mother is nice."

"But she wasn't married!"

"Fräulein! . . . What are you saying? . . . You must not say such a thing!"

"It's true! . . . That's why I haven't a name. . . . Adrienne Ambereyes isn't a name! . . . Not really. I used to think it was when I was little—when I was only ten years old. . . . But, now it's different. . . . My name isn't Parsons and my name isn't Ambereyes! . . . If I had one, they would tell me what it was fast enough. You and Mammy can't fool me!"

He had no reply for her, and in the face of his silence she experienced reaction. She was ashamed of herself. But she felt better, too, as one does who has been purged of an irritation. She had grown so tired of being treated like a child—evaded. . . . From that very first day when Stanley Denton had said, "Everybody has two names," doubt had entered into her soul. She had known instinctively then that something was wrong. . . . Again when her heart had leaped at Dustin Huntley's "Amber, eh? . . . Adrienne Ambereyes!" she had known her joy to be false. . . . And, then, to be called Parsons when that wasn't her name—by Mr. Huntley, by Mrs. Forsythe, by Karl, even! "Ach, Fräulein, what do you know about such things? . . .

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You read too many books, eh?" . . . Yes, she did read too many books, too many books to make people around her comfortable. . . . But she felt she would have known, anyway. . . . There were some things one did not have to get from the printed page.

Presently Karl began to whistle gayly. "You do not ask me all the things *I* have been doing, Fräulein."

"Well, what?" came from her grudgingly.

"Balls . . . parties . . . the theater . . . even the opera, Fräulein. San Francisco was wunderschön . . . Outside of the continent I have never seen such gayety. . . . Only I was too late for some things. . . . Last October they tell me that Leoncavallo himself led for *Pagliacci,* and they had *Electra* in the Greek Theater. Margaret Anglin in *Electra.* . . . Out of doors, at night under the stars . . . Can you fancy that, Fräulein? . . . I saw the designs for the sets and the costumes. . . . The stage grouping must have been marvelous . . . And to fancy, Fräulein, I once thought San Francisco a huge mining camp with Indians running around in war-paint! . . . And I come out to have Leoncavallo and *Electra* thrown in my face." He laughed. "In some ways it is disappointing."

She knew nothing of Leoncavallo or *Electra* or the Greek Theater, but Karl made these names alive and vivid. You felt on intimate terms with the most remote personalities and facts when he presented them.

"The Greek Theater, you should see it, Fräulein!" . . . But at night—always at night . . . row upon row of seats springing out of the hillside. Great, gray eucalypti standing guard at the back . . . overhead the stars . . . Yet they tell me that Bernhardt played

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Phedra there in the full glare of afternoon . . . an old woman with an injured leg—standing almost motionless before a throne and holding ten thousand people spellbound by her voice . . . by her gestures. . . . *She* could do that, of course . . . lesser people need the charity of night . . . night's mystery."

* * *

It was good to have Karl back, bringing the world with him! The world that lay beyond the rim of hills and which had assumed more and more importance. . . . Not the vague world of the seventies that Mammy talked about, the "Tassels-on-my-boots" world, but the present-day world crowded with names and places and events she scarcely knew. . . . Ah, but she was ignorant! . . . What a lot there remained to discover! . . . She settled back with a comfortable sigh and he went on:

"But *the* event, Fräulein! . . . Ach, that is what you will like to hear about. . . . A coming-out party for *Miss* Forsythe . . . a White Ball . . . marvelous!"

"*Miss* Forsythe?"

"Yes . . . Mrs. Forsythe's daughter, Elizabeth Forsythe, named for the lady who provided the money for all this splendor . . . You know, her picture is inside." . . . *Elizabeth Sinclair!*—with the lovely ivory satin dress, the veil. Of course, Adrienne knew. "Perhaps you read about it in the papers, Fräulein. . . . The Society columns were full of it." But Adrienne did not read the papers. Karl went on describing, gossiping. Could she imagine a huge garden in the Italian fashion with clipped hedges and sunken pools and marble

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statues? . . . Well, the Forsythe's country house at Hillsboro sits at the head of such a garden. Inside, the entire first floor has been made over for the occasion, stripped of every vestige of its permanent furniture and decoration, to provide the proper setting. Everything is black and silver. "But," objects Adrienne in approved Alice-in-Wonderland-fashion, "I thought this was a White Ball."

"A white ball, assuredly, as to costumes, Fräulein . . . But what sort of contrast would one get with white costumes against a white background? . . . Does she not understand that there must be contrast? That is the first principle of any art . . . Against a background of black and silver, then, move the guests, fragile and white. Ladies from the Court of Louis Quinze in billowing gowns, with tightly laced bodices; ladies stepped out of the Directoire period; ladies of the Second Empire, in the fashion of the Empress Eugenie. But all in white with powdered hair or elaborate white wigs. Ladies in tarleton ballet skirts; ladies with Veronese caps edged with pearls; ladies with Russian skating costumes trimmed with fur, but all in white. White Columbines, white shepherdesses, white viviandières! And the men not a whit less gorgeous: huzzars, cavaliers, court fops, Beau Brummels, pierrots: all, all as white and dazzling as snow! "Against a black-and-silver background, Fräulein!" Karl keeps reiterating this esthetic principle. . . . "It is a mild night for February and the fête spills out into the garden, among the terraces, winding through the graveled walks between the ilex hedges. The moon rises, bathing everything in a silver splendor. Startled white peacocks are

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herded across the lawn by liveried flunkies . . . fauns and dryads dart from the foliage . . . Greek maidens with pipes run dancing into the night. All, all in white! . . . Troubadours strumming enormous lutes, jongleurs turning handsprings . . . court ladies and gallants treading the mazes of the minuet under the magnolia trees. All, all in white! . . . Ach, Fräulein, the things money can buy! . . . And to think, two generations ago, this country, this California, was little better than a wilderness and to-day such things can take place. Palaces of the old world reproduced for a night, exquisite dreams made real to indulge a passing whim; gayety, love, laughter. And two generations ago a mining camp! . . . Marvelous, Fräulein! These countrymen of yours are marvelous!"

Adrienne is silent, spellbound at the vision, but, in the first lull of narrative, true to the traditions of her budding sex, she asks:

"And Elizabeth Forsythe, what did she wear?"

"A costume that belonged to no period, Fräulein. . . . Done by Paquin in Paris. . . . An exquisite thing of chiffon and swansdown and pearls . . . She floated, Fräulein, that is the only word for it, like a dream-swan upon a pool of night."

"And Mrs. Forsythe?"

"A dowager of the French court stately and bouffant. . . . Coming down the broad stone staircase connecting the upper and lower terraces, she looked for all the world like Marie Antoinette descending to meet Louis, himself. . . . Ach, how I do ramble on, Fräulein! . . . Yet you are a polite little girl. You listen when you cannot possibly understand half of what I am talking

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about. . . . How can you possibly know, hidden away here in the hills . . . fauns . . . dryads . . . pierrots . . . Beau Brummels. . . . Such things cannot mean anything to you."

Adrienne rises from her seat with dignity. "You are mistaken," she exaggerates a little coldly. "I understand everything you say. I know what words mean by their sound. . . . I have always known. And when I don't know I imagine. That, sometimes, is even nicer."

Karl looks at her long and quizzically. "What a strange little Fräulein you are, to be sure. . . . You will either be very happy or very miserable."

"I shall be very happy!" replies Adrienne with conviction.

* * *

The story of the White Ball was repeated for Mammy's benefit one night while she was serving Karl's dinner. Adrienne sat opposite Karl—a special guest for the evening meal.

"There wouldn't have been all that going-on if Elizabeth Sinclair had lived. . . . Jed Forsythe hasn't any money to speak of." This from Mammy.

"So? . . . Why did she never marry—Miss Sinclair, I mean?" Mammy shrugged. "She had admirers, no?"

"Dozens of them . . . Mr. Huntley was one. . . . She should have married him."

"So? . . . And what killed her?"

"Love."

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"Love. . . . What do you mean? . . . I do not understand."

"No man would."

Karl said no more. Like Adrienne he had learned the signs of Mammy's withdrawal from a conversation. Adrienne released a tiny sigh: gossip concerning Elizabeth Sinclair always made her melancholy. . . . When Mammy came back with fried chicken on a huge pink-and-green Canton platter Karl said:

"When the garden at Laguna Vista is in shape they have promised to have a fête here. . . . Elizabeth was not enthusiastic. She is like her mother when it comes to the wilderness. She cannot fancy anything charming out of motoring distance from a city. . . . But Bud Forsythe wants a party here. . . . Already he has decided to come to Laguna Vista when he finishes Harvard. Ah, Fräulein, you would like Bud Forsythe. . . . I have it! . . . We shall begin to brew a romance. You shall capture Bud Forsythe and the Sinclair millions. What do you say to that?"

Adrienne had nothing to say. She merely blushed, midway between embarrassment and displeasure. But Mammy replied for her, in her haughty, most patrician manner:

"We shall do nothing of the kind, Mr. Stralendorf, if you will excuse me . . . We will not even suggest such a thing!"

Her voice shook as she said it and her skin took on that strange pallor which anger sometimes gives to complexions faintly touched with the tar brush. This time Karl did not take refuge in silence. Instead he

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gayly changed the subject. "Next week, Fräulein, I shall begin your portrait. . . . I shall be going back to San Francisco in April again and I want to take it down with me. . . . Mrs. Forsythe is anxious to see what you look like. . . . Mr. Huntley raved all one evening about you. He was talkative enough once he got started. . . . Mrs. Forsythe teased him: She accused him of keeping something from her. Ah, Fräulein, you have aroused curiosity already and curiosity is one of the world's greatest factors. . . . But it was strange, was it not, that Mr. Huntley had never mentioned you?"

"A wise young man!" put in Mammy with curious significance.

Adrienne grew more and more puzzled. She never had seen Mammy in quite this mood. There was something sly and bitter and defensive about her. It was plain she didn't like Mrs. Forsythe. Ever since Karl's return from San Francisco, Adrienne had been like a person wading over her head in a water, dank and foul. . . . Christmas—her first Christmas seemed years behind. It was like the culmination of happiness. From that point things had slid down somehow. . . . She began to realize dimly, now, that one could not stay always on the heights. . . . Would contacts with the world always be as unsettling—as disturbing?

* * *

The portrait of Adrienne was the first attempt that Karl had ever made to paint in oils. "Of course I am not a portrait painter at all, Fräulein," he said. "But I know something of line and color, so why not?"

Adrienne, naturally, had no knowledge of, much less

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concern for, Karl's artistic limitations; she was not even sure always of his drift, but she liked him because he took her for granted, talked up to her as if she were his equal in age and experience. . . .

"It does beat all," broke in Mammy one day after she had stopped to listen to Karl's running fire of comment, "what store that child sets on everything you say . . . I'm sure she doesn't know what it all means . . . I don't myself."

The surge of anger that had begun to overwhelm Adrienne at this belittlement died with the assent of Mammy, herself, to the charge of ignorance. Karl shrugged.

"Children are all like that. And it's good for them. Things reduced to words of one syllable very soon disgust them. It is good for a child to get something hard between its teeth. It stiffens its grip on things."

Adrienne smiled her approval. "I don't understand what that means," she thought, "but I must remember it." And remember it she did, every word, until finally she began to see what it meant, dimly, as through fog. "It's like the hard words I used to be puzzled about in books. . . . After a while I *knew* what they meant. . . . Or I pretended to!" flashed through her mind. "When I don't know I imagine." That was the idea. But, if she didn't hear or read the words, how could she imagine? . . . That's what Karl meant by getting something hard between your teeth.

Sitting for the portrait would have been tedious work with any one but Karl. But his fund of experiences and backgrounds seemed inexhaustible. To begin with, it took days to drain dry the last series of events —his visit to the Forsythes. But she noticed that he

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took care never to enlarge on this when Mammy was within earshot . . . He had news too that was interesting and a little disheartening: in future his time was to be divided between Laguna Vista and San Francisco. He had obtained a commission to assist in landscaping the Panama Pacific Fair Grounds.

"That's really what I came to California for, Fräulein. . . . My health—well, partly that, too. . . . Two birds with one stone—that is how you say it? . . . So? . . . But, it is not always well to publish one's hopes too much in advance. Wire-pulling—another American expression. . . . Mr. Forsythe is a director and wires had to be pulled—by him. Discreetly, you understand. . . . Well, it has all been settled. . . . I am to assist in a glorious enterprise. . . . A Dream City, Fräulein, fancy! . . . The day I came away, I went down to see the site. . . . It skirts the bay. But, now, at present it is nothing but a mud-hole. . . . But you shall see what we do with it! . . . You shall see!"

This was what was to take him back to San Francisco in April. "But I shall not be long this time . . . a matter of two or three weeks . . . mere preliminaries. . . . Besides, I shall be needed back here. . . . The garden here needs special care to carry it over the summer drought."

For the rest of the time, while the portrait was being painted, the main topic of conversation was the Fair. . . . Adrienne felt vaguely relieved—the Forsythes had become a dangerous subject, even for her.

At last the picture was finished. It had an undeniable quality to it that even Mammy sensed. "You don't mean to say," she cried, "that you're going to tote that way down to San Francisco!"

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"And why not? . . . Mrs. Forsythe wants a look at it."

"Justine Forsythe!" chuckled Mammy.

That was all she said, but the exclamation was fraught with malicious irony.

* * *

When Karl left for San Francisco, the first week in April, he said to Adrienne:

"Watch the papers, Fräulein. . . . You will read all about the Fair plans in the papers."

Up to that time the newspapers had meant nothing to Adrienne. Twice a week, Joe had gone in to Lakeview and had brought back the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner,* the two San Francisco morning journals. But, for Adrienne, they had remained a jumble of records concerning things and people that she neither knew nor cared about. But, now, under the spur of a new interest, she began to wait eagerly for their arrival. The first week yielded no return but one day she came unexpectedly on Karl's name:

The executive committee of the Panama Pacific Company announce the appointment of Mr. Karl Stralendorf of Munich and Vienna as assistant landscape artist for the Fair grounds. Mr. Stralendorf received his training in Paris and has made exhaustive studies of old-world gardens. He is well known in Europe as an authority on the Italian and Spanish treatment of gardens, particularly with reference to architecture. His book *The Moorish Influence on the Gardens of Spain* has been translated into five languages.

It was strange and thrilling to see Karl's name thus in cold print. Somebody she knew! . . . Fancy! *An*

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authority on Italian and Spanish gardens . . . His book . . . *translated into five languages.* Well, Karl was somebody, wasn't he?

After that, scarcely a day passed without something.

At a meeting of the Grounds committee of the Panama Pacific Exposition, Karl Stralendorf presiding in the absence of the chairman. . . . It was decided—

Preliminary sketches for the ground plan of the Panama Pacific gardens were offered by Karl Stralendorf.

Mr. Karl Stralendorf will speak before the Commonwealth Club at a luncheon on . . .

An exhibit of line drawings showing the use of statuary in North Italian Gardens, by Mr. Karl Stralendorf, will take place in the Elder Galleries . . .

Mr. Karl Stralendorf, assistant landscape artist of the Panama Pacific Exposition will be the guest of honor at a reception given by the Downtown Association in the Red Room of . . .

There was no end to this sort of thing. And, then, one day out of a clear sky in quite another section of the paper, the Society columns to be exact, appeared this record:

Mrs. Jeremiah Forsythe entertained informally at dinner at her home in Jackson Street on Wednesday evening, complimentary to Baron Karl Ludwig von Stralendorf. . . . The baron is making an extended stay in San Francisco in connection with the Panama Pacific Fair. Mrs. Forsythe's guests were:

Messrs. and Mesdames

Clifford Woods *Luis Castro*

Forrest Deering

Misses

Conchita Emory *Jane Witherspoon*

Messrs.

Stuart Clinton *Baron Karl von Stralendorf*

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Adrienne flew to Mammy speechless with pride and surprise. *Her* Karl—*their* Karl a baron! . . . But Mammy refused to be impressed. She was much more interested in the other names. The Clifford Woods—Mrs. Clifford Woods had been a Norbert and old grandfather Norbert had begun his career in San Francisco with a peddler's pack. . . . Luis Castro—old Spanish, of course, but poor as a church mouse until he had married the O'Rourke millions which Mike O'Rourke had started to accumulate in a little sailors' saloon and boarding-house on Howard Street. The Forrest Deerings she did not know: Easterners, no doubt. Conchita Emory: Spanish and English. John Emory had been a remittance man who had married one of the Sanchez heirs. She had been homely enough in all conscience and quite without suitors until oil had been struck on what had always been rated as the worthless Sanchez Rancho. Mammy hoped that Conchita had escaped the devastating Sanchez nose and leathery complexion. . . . Jane Witherspoon! . . . Could it be possible that Jane Witherspoon was "getting in" to society? . . . Well, times had changed, that was all Mammy had to say. . . . What was wrong with Jane Witherspoon? Nothing that Adrienne would understand: something that concerned her parents. There remained only one name unaccounted for—Stuart Clinton. It seemed that Stuart Clinton had the support of a family name plus a position as wine drummer for a famous French champagne. He gave extravagant parties at which the wine flowed like water by way of advertisement. He organized cotillions and ruled with

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a social rod of iron. A pasteboard society king, Mammy called him.

Adrienne retired from Mammy's onslaughts with her colors tattered but flying. She didn't care what Mammy said about the others, but a baron must be a baron even if he were found in plebeian company. Adrienne was still young enough to be impressed by a title. A prince was a prince by virtue of his qualities. And Karl did not lack qualities. She remembered, now, with awe how freely she had treated him! . . . And to think of him, Baron Karl Ludwig von Stralendorf, scrambling up a hillside to chop down a Christmas tree for her, and serving drinks to sweating ranch men; and lighting Christmas candles with his own hands! . . .

Mrs. Jeremiah Forsythe's dinner apparently had been the signal for the rest of the exclusive Hillsboro set. Dinners formal and informal, house parties, tea-dansants—it seemed that no social function during the weeks which followed was complete without the presence of Baron Karl Ludwig von Stralendorf.

She glowed warmly at his triumphs although it removed him somewhat from future contacts. But she took care not to go again to Mammy with her enthusiasms. . . . One day an item appeared which left her speechless.

An interested throng passed in and out of the Print Shop yesterday to view a portrait in oil by Mr. Karl von Stralendorf. . . . Mr. von Stralendorf, who is really the Baron Karl Ludwig von Stralendorf, is the assistant director of gardens for the Exposition. He is devoted to taking his recreation by way of the paint brush and while he modestly disclaims any right to be considered seriously

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as an artist in oils, his vigorous treatment of the canvas in question betrays execution and training. The subject is a young girl, full of the wistful and delicate charm of budding girlhood. . . . San Francisco is indebted to Mrs. Jeremiah Forsythe for the chance to view this interesting work. It was she who insisted on a public exhibition. Previously the picture had been viewed informally by friends of Mrs. Forsythe's at her home in Jackson Street. Their enthusiasm inspired a public view with the result that the Print Rooms were chosen for the event. . . . The portrait is named "Ambereyes" and lives up completely to its poetic title.

She *had* to take this to Mammy . . .

Mammy read it twice, then broke into a hoarse chuckle:

"Insisted on a public exhibition! . . . Ambereyes! Good Lord!"

* * *

Sharing Karl's San Francisco triumphs by way of the newspaper was not the only mental occupation engaging Adrienne during his absence. Day in and day out she kept turning the matter of her parentage over in her mind. She felt, now, that she had a right to ask Mammy some direct questions.

One night, in the half-dusk of an early Spring twilight, Mammy and she were sitting out on the narrow pier at which the lake-crafts landed when they stopped at Laguna Vista. The air was warm with hints of a spring already upon the threshold of early summer. In the heavy-scented gloom the opposite shore loomed steeply ominous. The outline of the cliff which rose

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back of the borax lake at Denton's made a menacing silhouette against the sky. The memory of the day when she had first beheld it swept over her. "That nigger ain't your mother, is she?" Stanley Denton's challenge rang in her ears again with all its inflection of childish contempt. She felt her breath come in a little gasp, as it had done that day, and by way of introduction to what she knew was to follow she said to Mammy:

"How old was I when you first took me to see the Dentons?"

Mammy reflected. "Oh, 'bout four, I reckon. . . . Why?"

Adrienne felt a strange calmness descend upon her. "Nothing; only that was the first time I knew I had no mother. . . . Stanley Denton asked me where she was. . . . He asked me my father's name, too. . . . He was horrid."

She did not look at Mammy but she heard the soft tap of her foot upon the plank walk. "I've known it for nearly ten years, now—known that something was wrong. . . . Why is it that I have no name of my own?"

"You have a name, right enough, honey-child."

"Then why don't you tell me what it is? . . . I heard you tell Karl one night that my father was a musician. . . . Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Is he alive?"

"I don't know."

Adrienne hesitated, then plunged boldly. "And my mother?"

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"She's dead, honey-child."

A deep silence . . . the sound of gnats buzzing. "Who was she?"

"I can't tell you, now, honey. . . . You'll know some day . . . when the time comes."

"Why not now?"

"Because I promised I wouldn't. . . . You wouldn't want me to break my promise, would you? . . . 'When she's eighteen!' That's what your mother said. It was almost the last thing she told me."

Again the silence . . . again the buzzing gnats. "You can't tell me my name?"

"Your father's name, you mean?"

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"Perhaps. . . . No, I can't tell you. . . . I promised that, too."

"Why must I wait?"

"Because there is something you must decide. . . . You are too young now, honey-child."

"Why didn't Mr. Huntley ever tell Mrs. Forsythe about me? . . ."

"Mr. Huntley is a busy man. . . . Men don't bother remembering such things."

"Does Mr. Huntley know who I am?"

"Not from me, honey."

"But he suspects . . . he must. . . . Or else he'd have told all about me. . . . I know!"

"You know too much, honey-child. . . . Don't think any more about it. . . . Some day everything will be all right."

"That isn't so. It will never be all right. . . .

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Not that. . . . I think . . . I think I know who my mother was."

For a moment Adrienne's heart stood still. Everything depended on Mammy's answer.

"Perhaps you do—perhaps."

She felt the silent tears coursing down her cheeks. At last she knew. . . . And in that moment which translated intuition into certainty she felt that there had never been a time when she had not guessed the truth.

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Chapter Five

"THE train is an hour late," Bess Forsythe stood in the doorway leading from the library to the sun-porch, snapping out her announcement.

Her mother stirred languidly. "That means I'll have to miss the Kajetan concert, I guess. . . . You'd better ring up Jane Witherspoon and ask her to go with you. . . . I don't know any one else we can insult with an eleventh-hour invitation."

Bess flung herself into a steamer chair. "It serves you right! Why you wanted to invite a totally strange young person to be your house guest is more than I can imagine."

Mrs. Forsythe arranged her floating sleeves. "Because I think she'll be amusing. . . . What's a piano concert more or less?"

"Oh, it isn't that! . . . But this is just a beginning. You'll see: she'll complicate everything. People without background always do. If she were anybody at all, you could send Dekins down with the car. You could anyway if you had any sense."

"Hardly. . . . She's just a child, remember. . . . She's never seen any place bigger than Lakeview. Why, she'd be frightened to death."

"Don't be absurd. She's sixteen, remember. Lots of our grandmothers were married before that. And if Karl Stralendorf's portrait of her at fourteen is any indication, why—" Bess completed the idea with a significant shrug. "By the way, why didn't you send

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Karl after her? Or is he too busy philandering all over the place to spend a half-hour meeting his little playmate?"

Mrs. Forsythe laughed a little affected laugh that only partially concealed her irritation. "Really, Elizabeth, any one would think you were jealous." She drew together her well-defined eyebrows. "Of Stralendorf, I mean. You'd better get him off your mind. A German baron isn't the catch he was two years ago."

Bess tapped the floor with the tip of her slipper. And, having released her scorn in action instead of speech, she said with cutting irrelevance: "How long have you asked her to stay?"

"I didn't set any time. . . . Two weeks—a month. . . . It depends on how diverting she is."

"There must be something back of this invitation," Bess flung back tartly. "You're not impulsive, mom. . . . I haven't said anything—because our sort pretend we don't see what's going on unless we're invited to a private view. I suppose it is none of my business, but I think you might trust me. At least you might give me an inkling so—so I would know what line to take."

Mrs. Forsythe reached for a cigarette. "My dear child, it's nearly one-thirty, now. If you don't ring up about that concert you'll find even Jane Witherspoon engaged. Then, you will be frantic! You know how you hate to go anywhere alone."

Bess Forsythe met this rebuke with a faint sneer. "In that case I'll not go at all!"

"Come now, don't be ridiculous! . . . Nobody

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misses hearing Kajetan play if they're in their right senses."

"Well, *you* appear to be missing him."

"I've heard him dozens of times. . . . Twenty years ago he was the sensation of the season. . . . Your Aunt Elizabeth always had a box. . . . He gave Thursday matinées at the old Baldwin Theatre. The girls were crazy about him. I've burst open many a pair of new kid gloves applauding. . . . And, your aunt! *Really!*" She laughed a little thinly as if to hide a cynical memory, and Bess, in a last attempt to win her mother as a concert companion, said:

"I should think you'd be all the more anxious to hear him, then. . . . He's only giving one concert, you know."

"I'm more interested in *seeing* him. Besides, concerts are stupid things, now. *This* generation doesn't lose its head over anybody. And, as for splitting kid gloves! . . . well, to begin with they don't wear them. . . . So run along and leave me to my rural visitor. . . . I'll see Kajetan if I have to give a dinner party for him."

"That's a keen idea! Do you suppose he'll come?"

"He will if he hasn't changed. . . . In the old days he was always ready to sample the Sinclair provender —including the champagne. . . . And, how he did play, after! . . . That's the way to really hear him. There was nothing anemic about Kajetan: he looked like a god and played like a demon. . . . My, how he used to thrill me!"

Bess brightened. "I'll come back with a complete

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report. . . . You won't want him if he's passé, will you?"

"Kajetan could never be that!"

Her daughter shrugged, in the manner of a skeptical younger generation, and dashed from the room.

Mrs. Forsythe lit her cigarette thoughtfully.

* * *

Justine Forsythe sat motionless for some moments after her daughter had left. She was debating whether or not it would be diverting or even expedient to arrange a dinner party for Kajetan, the great Bohemian pianist. . . . He might refuse to come. Would he? . . . She wondered. She hadn't really wanted to go to his concert; yet a faint indecision had lurked in the background of her disinclination—and so she had seized avidly at the excuse of a late train from Lakeview, although it was flimsy enough in all conscience. If Bess had been clever she would have remembered that Dustin Huntley always was available for such an emergency. And especially this one—knowing the child and everything. . . . Well, at last she was to see this Adrienne Ambereyes! A ridiculous nickname, of course, but enormously provocative. And disquieting, too, when she allowed herself to be disquieted. But, for the moment, even the prospect of being in a position to pin her faint suspicions to the wall was routed by the figure of Kajetan looming gigantically across the horizon of the past. It was as if, suddenly, with a pair of powerful field glasses, she had annihilated time, space —the years. The memories that swept her bit sharply into her entrenched content. She hadn't fancied that

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it would ever matter again. . . . And yet, what else could one expect from a sudden mental revival of a vital experience. . . . Experience? Not exactly. Experience went beneath the surface—was opulent. *Rich in experience*—that was a phrase she loved. No, it had missed being an experience—thanks to Elizabeth Sinclair, or rather thanks to Elizabeth Sinclair's background. She was still passionate enough on the subject to grant Elizabeth as little personal triumph as possible. Not that Elizabeth had been unattractive, Justine Forsythe was too sporting to deny such an obvious truth, but to be attractive and also able to provide the proper setting—there was no combination that could beat that! . . . Now at this later date, she, Justine Forsythe, had the proper setting—after twenty years! . . . But what else? *What else!*

She threw her cigarette to the floor and stamped on it, rising. . . . How ridiculous it was—to feel this way—after twenty years! She, a comfortable matron, with two grown children, an unexacting husband, and the entire Sinclair fortune!

She moved slowly toward the north windows and stood for a long time looking out at the Marin hills on the opposite shore . . . brown, bleached hills that at this midsummer season seemed forever seared and done for. Yet she knew that by October, at the first touch of moisture, they would begin to quicken. Life was like that, or should be, she thought: a series of quiescence and revivals. . . . A comfortable matron: midsummer quiescence . . . At the first touch of moisture . . . She wondered . . . She drew her gaze in toward the immediate foreground—the

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Exposition glittering like a dew-sprinkled garden in the July sunlight. That was where Kajetan was playing that afternoon in the lovely Festival Hall. . . . What a fool she had been to let the chance to have an impersonal view of him elude her! Would his jet black hair be sprinkled with gray? And those heavy beetle brows, would they still draw his eyes together in swift, darting glances?

She remembered so vividly the first time she had ever seen him. He had come to Berkeley to give a concert in the University Gymnasium and he had brought a letter to her father from a chemistry colleague in Germany. In the dull firmament of a college town Kajetan flamed like a meteor in full flight. He captured her imagination as a hawk captures a terror-stricken bird. . . . Yes, he did just that—charmed and terrified her. For the first time in her life she knew the complete inadequacy of her background. Vaguely she always had been irked by her father's chill penury. A wifeless professor in chemistry—Mrs. Wentworth had died when Justine was ten—at the State University on three thousand a year! Adequate enough if one cared to live without gayety. But when one finished paying house rent and a slovenly servant and bought expensive books upon one's subject there was precious little left for froth. And it had been froth that Justine had craved—without defining her hunger beyond acknowledging the gnawing pain. She had had glints of frivolity through Elizabeth Sinclair, unsustained, sporadic glimpses. Not that Elizabeth lacked the inclination or capacity to do more for her cousin. But Professor Wentworth was full of dull

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resentments against people who were financially opulent, which betrayed itself in fierce academic pride. . . . Reduced to its bare terms, accepting invitations from the Sinclairs was a matter of proper clothes. One needed trunks of dresses to do cotillions and opera and five-o'clock teas. Justine was too fastidious to accept cast-offs and her father was too proud to permit Elizabeth Sinclair to provide the proper wardrobe for his daughter. The impassé was complete. Beyond a luncheon for females now and then Justine had almost less contact with her cousin's world than with the world of Lena, the Wentworth maid-of-all-work. And how she hated these anemic occasions made up for the most part of a dozen or more vapid, gossiping débutantes—members of the younger set, as the society columns always called them. And how they patronized her! "Oh, yes, Miss Wentworth, of course!" This with scarcely a lift of the eyebrows as they were introduced, perhaps for the twentieth time. She didn't blame them, now. She scarcely blamed them, then. A relation who was only in evidence at hen parties always was bound to be a very obscure, a very poor relation. She always came away vowing never to go again. And then, at the next invitation, an unquenchable, pathetic hope that this time things would be different, made her send back an acceptance.

In retrospect she used to think that these "pink" luncheons were even more deadly than the concerts in Hearst Hall or the Harmon Gymnasium at Berkeley. Not in a dull, dreary sense of course—nothing could match academic occasions for dowdiness—but in sheer emptiness.

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Even in her most exasperated moments she had to admit that these occasions had a glitter on the surface: at least the cut glass sparkled even if the conversation did not. . . . And one heard about men. Not stooped-shouldered, near-sighted individuals reducing a biological indecency to prosaic terms, or digging for hidden inconsequences in some dead classic, or wrestling with a new system of unworkable ethics. But men who swaggered and drank and wore their clothes with an air . . . who committed adorable indiscretions and went in for polo and fast ponies. Sitting in the midst of tinkling vacuity she used to think: "God! If I only had a chance to meet the proper men . . . I'd show them!" And she would survey the table with a contemptuous glance until her eyes fell upon her cousin. Elizabeth usually had a smile on her lips, amused and inscrutable. One never knew just what Elizabeth Sinclair was thinking.

Yes, in spite of all the humiliations, and irritations and anxieties connected with being decently gowned, even a "pink" luncheon was an escape from the dowdiness of academic functions. And chief of these in deadliness was the average concert in Hearst Hall or the Harmon Gymnasium.

When she had seen placards tacked up on the University bulletin boards to the effect that Kajetan, the eminent pianist, was to appear on a certain Friday night the only feeling that stirred her was one of indifferent boredom. She had heard "eminent" performers before. They were usually earnest, faded, uninspired. Playing correctly, in perfect taste, but missing fire somehow with pathetic completeness. She went duti-

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fully with her father to hear Kajetan. He swept upon the stage without glancing to right or left and, seating himself at the piano, plunged into a vivid composition of his own. Instantly she was caught up, transported; when he finished she was in tears. She felt in the grip of a tremendous force—a compelling unmorality. She left the concert, frightened.

Next day he called at the house with a letter for her father. She was alone. He came in and played for her—all afternoon. He hardly spoke. . . . When he left she pressed him to come again. He merely shrugged and departed. . . . She raged for hours after he had left—she was not sure whether insolence or contempt lay back of his indifference. Finally she decided that he merely had been bored. Obviously he would not come *there* again. What was she to do? . . . She thought of Elizabeth Sinclair. Elizabeth could offer a background. She sat down and wrote her cousin at once: "I have an interesting man I want you to invite to dinner." Elizabeth responded promptly. With incredible persistence Justine camped on Kajetan's trail and finally compelled an acceptance of the invitation. . . .

From the moment Justine saw Kajetan enter the Sinclair house she knew that she had played the wrong card. She was right in suspecting that the background would prove impressive, but she had not counted on her cousin as an arresting part of that background. And Kajetan himself seemed too far removed from the suave formalities of a drawing-room to enter it except as a curiosity.

Elizabeth's enthusiasm was discreet but unmistak-

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able and even Kajetan veiled his usual insolences beneath a thousand charming gestures. And, though Justine was tacitly in all the gayeties that followed, she was shoved more and more into a corner until, in the end, she became reduced to the rôle of an exasperated onlooker. Exasperated and a bit puzzled. Was Elizabeth really as charmed as she appeared to be or was she aiming indirectly at the faithful but tongue-tied Dustin Huntley? If this were her game, she drew her bow in vain, for Huntley was too completely disarmed by Kajetan's exotic personality to take him in any wise except indulgently, treating him as one might treat a pet monkey that was for the moment diverting the lady of his heart.

A week passed, two weeks, a month, and still Kajetan lingered. It was plain to everybody that he should have been up and off about his business of giving recitals and touring the country instead of dawdling about steeped in the seductions of an alien opulence. Justine, from her corner, alternately raged and sought other consolations. Or, rather, accepted such consolations as were offered her; principally in the shape of attentions from Jed Forsythe, the young lawyer who had just joined Dustin Huntley in a business partnership. Jed Forsythe, attractive, easy, good natured, who talked charming nonsense to Justine when he took her in to dinner and made well-bred love to her while a strange, inward torrent was coursing through her veins. Jed Forsythe whose attentions would have dazzled her six weeks before, but who became now merely a cool distraction that gave her moments of

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refreshment, sometimes soothing, sometimes profound with irritation.

Suddenly, without warning, Kajetan left, leaving no word of farewell, indulging in no empty flourishes of courtesy or manners. Elizabeth laughed gayly over his gauche exit—a bit too gayly, Justine fancied. Justine neither laughed nor sighed—she announced her engagement to Jed Forsythe instead.

It was three years before Kajetan returned to San Francisco. Justine was too preoccupied with the demands of motherhood to so much as see him. But word came that he had walked into the drawing-room of the Sinclair's with the same impudent informality that he had quit it and received a warm welcome.

Dustin Huntley was away in Europe on a holiday, which meant a clear field for Kajetan and reduced Elizabeth's motives in flirting with the musician to its simplest denomination. Kajetan stayed on and on—six months this time. And, then, suddenly, as before, over night he took wing again. From that moment on Elizabeth Sinclair became lost to view. She died within a year, having spent the greater part of that time at Laguna Vista.

Baldly reviewed, the entire circumstance lacked special significance. Except that it had served to unleash feminine rancours. Justine never forgave her cousin for snaring Kajetan's interest. His personality had flamed maidenhood to sudden unfathomable self-consciousness. But that was long ago. Much water had flowed under the bridge since those days of primitive reactions to impulse. Justine had inherited her cousin's fortune and married an attractive if not an overwhelming

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male. . . . It was surprising, then, to discover, twenty years later, all the old lightning flashing again from that dim horizon.

To-day, after twenty years, Kajetan was back in San Francisco. And the mere suggestion of his nearness disquieted her. Her mood made her impatient. Really, there was only one way to settle the issue once and for all. She would ask Kajetan to dine with her if only to invite disillusionment. It wasn't on the cards that he would remain as attractive as of old. And, even granting that he did, she was no longer an impressionable girl. She drew back from the window, moving pensively toward her wicker chair again. The maid stood in the doorway.

"The young lady has arrived, Mrs. Forsythe."

"Adrienne! . . . Not really! . . . Tell her I shall be down at once."

* * *

Her first thought as she faced Adrienne across the trivial gold table in the reception room was:

"How tall—how incredibly tall for sixteen!"

Then she looked at her eyes. Amber! Unquestionably amber! At once, soft and shrewd and disquieting. Why had she invited her? It was so senseless to force issues.

"Is this Mrs. Forsythe?"

The coolness of tone had a chiding quality. "And you are Adrienne! . . . What must you think of me? . . . They said the train was over an hour late. I fancied I would have plenty of time to run down to the Ferry for you."

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"We made up a half-hour between Santa Rosa and San Rafael. . . . I hired a taxi. Mammy told me just what to do in case we didn't connect."

"Mammy? . . . Old Selina Parsons, of course! . . . How is she? . . . I haven't seen her for years. . . . Come over here and let me see you. . . . Yes, you are quite as Karl described you. And besides we had your portrait with us for a time. . . . And what a pretty frock you have! We shall have such a good time . . . Karl tells me you sing charmingly."

"A few German songs . . . He taught me everything I know."

"German songs? . . . How unfortunate . . . just at this time. Not that *I* care . . . but some folks are so ridiculous! . . . Still, when we're alone— And you play your own accompaniment, too. . . . You see we know all about you."

"Everything?"

What a challenging tone! . . . And what composure! Sinclair composure. The thought escaped before it could be stifled.

"That you are musical, at any rate. . . . I was just planning a treat when the maid announced you. I'm thinking of having Kajetan to dinner. He's an extraordinary pianist."

"I've read about him. . . . He's a Bohemian, isn't he?"

"Ah, I see we can't tell you anything. . . . Would you like to hear him play? . . . He's marvelous when he plays informally . . . at least he was when I last heard him. . . . I'll have Olga show you to your room. It's next to Elizabeth's. I hope you'll be comfort-

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able. . . . Would you like to run out to the Fair grounds this afternoon?"

"I think I'll rest, thank you."

"Exactly. . . . Well, to-night, perhaps. . . . It's marvelous at night. We dine at seven o'clock. I've asked Karl and Mr. Huntley to come. I thought it might be less strange if you had some one you knew."

"Thank you. . . . You're very kind, I'm sure."

"Nothing of the sort. . . . Olga, will you take Adrienne—may I call you Adrienne—up to her room? . . ."

She watched her guest mounting the stairs preceded by Olga, carrying a hand-bag. The child's poise was perfect. She had even relinquished her hand-bag with an air. *I think I'll rest, thank you.* Fancy a girl fresh from the country passing up an early opportunity to see the Fair grounds! Was the child posing? An interesting creature. Extremely interesting. And just a trifle baffling. Old beyond her years. That was unfortunate for any child. She'd bear watching. . . . Well, that would be so of any one reared by that infamous old Selina Parsons. A baffling old creature, herself. . . . She must ask Kajetan to dinner, now. She would *have* to ask him, after committing herself. As a matter of fact she had intended to from the very first. Why drag in Adrienne then as an excuse? . . . Why indeed? The question tickled her. . . . Already she felt years younger. She began to wonder what Bess would think of him. As if *that* mattered!

* * *

She asked Kajetan to come for a cup of tea in ad-

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vance of dinner. "To get acquainted, again!" as she put it over the telephone. He stepped upon the sun-porch where she lay stretched out on her favorite wicker chair and she gave him a hand to kiss. A little tremor ran through her as his lips brushed her skin.

"Confess!" she cried, "you had no idea who I was when I rang up. . . ."

"My dear lady, I have no idea, even now."

He said it with that charming insolence she remembered only too well.

"You couldn't have complimented me more completely," she drawled, withdrawing her hand. "I was such a frump when you first knew me, years ago; the dowdy daughter of a professor in chemistry. . . . Think hard. You came one afternoon with a letter to my father. He was out. You stayed all afternoon and played for me. You didn't speak a word. Even when you left you merely shrugged. I was furious."

"And was that all? . . . The end, I mean?"

She looked at him shrewdly. He remembered her perfectly. She might have known as much. What he wanted was to have the name of Elizabeth Sinclair drawn into the conversation.

"You know it was not," she answered coldly. "At least not the end for you. . . . For me—well, that was different! . . ." She gave a bitter twist to her words. "I was stupid enough to call in help."

"Always an error, my dear madam. . . . I think I begin to remember you now. . . . And what became of the fair cousin?"

"Elizabeth Sinclair? . . . Is it possible you don't know? She has been dead for nearly seventeen

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years. . . . You can't mean you were too indifferent to make inquiries."

He shrugged. "After all these years, Madam? . . ."

She hated and admired him. "Ah, of course," she said, putting a keen edge on her voice, "you are an artist. I quite forgot."

He clicked his heels together and made a stiff military bow. "Precisely. An artist."

"And an artist remembers only his art."

"If he is a true artist."

"As you are!"

"You flatter me."

"Only by proxy. . . . It is my daughter who really is one of your raving fans. She came home from your concert the other day quite mad."

"You did not go yourself, then?"

She loved the note of petulant injury in his voice. "I couldn't . . . I was expecting a visitor from the country. I want you to hear her sing, Kajetan. Untrained, naturally—but a spark somewhere. A child of sixteen. A potential artiste herself, I fancy. Tell me, will she grow up ruthless, too?"

"Ruthless? . . . We are not ruthless. But no man can serve two mistresses."

"But this child is a woman."

"Women are never artists. . . ."

"How can you say such a thing!"

"Well, not creators, anyway. . . . They merely interpret. A very different matter."

"Come, you are quibbling, Kajetan. . . . And we are both growing tiresome. . . . Shall we have tea?"

"If you have forgiven me."

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"Forgiven you! . . . For what?"

"For forgetting Elizabeth Sinclair."

She gave an ironic laugh. "As if that would matter. But you might have remembered *me*."

He sat down and drew his chair close to her. "I have done something better, Madam."

"What is that, pray?"

"I have *discovered* you."

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Chapter Six

ADRIENNE's first formal dinner party. She sits between Mr. Huntley and Karl. Her dress is of no great moment, good enough as to color but without special lines—a sea-green slip of a dress thrown hurriedly together by Mammy. . . . Karl is enormously proud of her, she can feel that. But Mr. Huntley seems disturbed. . . . Somehow she has a sense that Mr. Huntley does not approve of her visit to the Forsythes. There are times when she is not sure whether she approves, herself. When the invitation had first come she said to Mammy:

"What shall I do?"

Mammy replied with one of her rare chuckles. "What shall you do, honey? . . . Why, you'll go—that's what you'll do. . . . Time you were getting a peep at life. You won't be living on this lake forever."

Since that night on the landing she never had spoken to Mammy again about the mystery of her birth. But, now, she felt the time had come to refer to it. "But *should* I, Mammy? . . . Would Mrs. Forsythe want me if—if—if she knew?"

Mammy chose to be uncomprehending. "If she knew what, honey? . . . I don't know what you-all is talking about."

Adrienne's first impulse had been one of anger. Mammy must have remembered that night when the truth had stalked so perilously near. She herself had kept it at bay ever since. It was too precious and ter-

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rifying to ponder. And what if her intuition were wrong? She didn't want it to be wrong, now. The best thing to do was not to think about it. And, above all the misgivings, there rose an unconquerable curiosity. She wanted to see Mrs. Forsythe; she wanted a glimpse of opulence.

After four days in the Forsythe household she had brief moments between ecstasies when she questioned the wisdom of her presence. Bess cordially disliked her and took little pains to conceal it and sometimes Mrs. Forsythe's hospitality seemed a trifle hard and brittle. But, on the whole, she was swept along so buoyantly upon a swift stream of impression that she had little sense of any stagnant back eddies.

The table to-night is something to dream about—silver, and gilt china, and heavy linen, smothered beneath the reddest roses she has ever seen. The Clifford Woods are there and the Forrest Deerings. Likewise Conchita Emory. These are names she remembers from the newspaper account of Mrs. Forsythe's first dinner to Karl, and Mammy's comments still ring in her ears. It is incredible that the grandfather of any one so patrician looking as Mrs. Clifford Wood could have started his career with a peddler's pack. The Forrest Deerings *are* from the East as Mammy had suspected—New York, in fact. Mrs. Deering affects severe coiffures and black gowns and she seems inclined not to forget New York for one little moment. Forrest Deering is a florid personality without being expansive or ponderous. One might almost characterize him as slender, yet it is a slenderness achieved by distinct effort. He gives the impression of being con-

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stantly in leash and his brown eyes leap over the barrier of red roses and flash challenges at Adrienne.

Conchita Emory, a fascinating little creature with a head a trifle too heavy for the slender neck supporting it, evidently has escaped the devastating Sanchez nose and leathery complexion upon which Mammy had waxed so sarcastic. And, of course, there is Jane Witherspoon. Adrienne almost forgot about her. But she had such a capacity for self-effacement, one usually did. A person who "filled in" when any scheduled guest disappointed. A creature of gentle features and faded blue eyes, who just missed personality, with a suggestion of tragedy about her. Just what sort of tragedy, Adrienne had not yet felt free to inquire. The other guests had been lost to Adrienne in the blur of first introductions. All except the guest of honor. But one scarcely could escape Kajetan. Coal black eyes flaring to blazing lividness, strong, supple shoulders, a brow that could darken or lift with incredible swiftness. A distinct contrast to Jed Forsythe, clean cut and cool, with a temperament that never soared beyond gallant good-humor.

Adrienne cannot help but compare this gathering with her first real feast at Laguna Vista. It all comes back to her with the poignant vividness of something irrevocably lost. Karl; the sour-smelling Joe; Ferguson, the Scot; the Basque shepherd, Felix; Carlborg, the clean-limbed Swede; Mrs. Denton, puritanical and caustic; Jim Denton, slightly tipsy; Stanley, morose and sullen. Two years ago! . . . Can it be possible that it is only two years? Why, she was a child, then! She knows she is not a child now from the remark that

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Forrest Deering made when Mrs. Forsythe presented her. "Adorable—you are adorable, my dear!" But not openly, nor in the fashion of Karl's gentle compliments. Between closed lips. Meant for her ears only. She knows that much if she is but sixteen. Ah, but she will be seventeen within the month. How thrilling if she were still to be the guest of the Forsythes, then. And have a dinner party like this one. Sweet madness!

Karl turns from a chat with Conchita Emory and breaks softly in upon her dreaming:

"And what is the Fräulein thinking of? . . . Not homesick, eh?"

"I was thinking of our first celebration. . . . You remember that Christmas dinner."

Karl's face brightened. "No! . . . Not really! . . . Can you remember such a simple thing, now?"

"I shall never forget *that*. . . . No dinner will ever be as lovely as that. . . . The liqueur at the end—I can see Mrs. Denton, now. She was shocked, wasn't she?"

"You will have champagne, to-night. In these beautiful iridescent glasses. . . . And you must drink my health, Fräulein, in your first sip of wine."

"I must not take too much, must I? . . . And shall we have liqueurs, too?"

"Yes, at the end. . . . After the black coffee. While we are waiting to hear the great Kajetan play."

"You didn't speak to him when you came into the room. . . . You were rude, Karl, dear."

"I stayed away on purpose. . . . He will not like me because I am German. We are enemies, you see. . . .

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I try not to embarrass Mrs. Forsythe. But I bear him no grudge, you understand. For he is a great artist. . . . Art is something apart from war."

"You have been so strange and quiet ever since I came here, Karl. . . . Is something troubling you?"

She feels his hand closing in upon hers under the table. "Many things are troubling me, Fräulein. . . . Come! Come! What am I talking about? . . . And here is the champagne, Fräulein. Remember! My health, silently, in your first sip."

She takes the glass by its slender stem. How beautiful the wine is and how it bubbles, making fairy pearls that are shattered against the glass prison. She puts the thin, smooth edge to her lips. Karl's health, silently, in her first sip of wine. His eyes are looking deep into hers—sad, sad eyes. She lowers her lids. The wine is cold. She shivers a little. . . . Somebody is laughing.

"What's the idea over there? . . . All this solemnity!"

It is Bess Forsythe's voice. Adrienne feels her color rising.

"Solemn?" Karl is answering for her. "Naturally. . . . One's first sip of wine should always be a solemn occasion. . . . The gayety comes quickly enough. . . . See, she is laughing already!"

And in gratitude Adrienne feels her lips break into a smile. Forrest Deering lifts his glass to her, blowing her a kiss over the rim. Her color comes again.

* * *

Liqueurs and coffee in the music room. . . . Ad-

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rienne detached herself from the group hovering about Kajetan and sat down in a shadowy corner. The music room was the old formal parlor of the seventies done over into a renaissance magnificence. The alabaster vases upon the Florentine mantel were crowded with American beauty buds just opening, and on every table were banked riots of dahlias. A slightly raised platform supported a grand piano flanked on either side by gilt-and-lacquer Japanese screens. Adrienne had withdrawn so that she might get a better picture of the company. The life about her was still too impersonal to seem quite real. And she had not yet exhausted the thrills of looking on.

To-night's scene was like something she had read about in romances on the library shelves at Laguna Vista. Or more properly, perhaps, a motion picture that suddenly had achieved depth and color. In the little frame picture-house at Lakeview she had spent many rapt hours with Karl during the past year, looking at scenes far less opulent. Whenever he had come up from town to spend a week-end and rest, she had found a good excuse to ride into Lakeview with Joe so that she could see the latest picture. The photoplay of the wide-open spaces bored her. And, in most cases, the story didn't matter. It was the background that counted. Spacious hallways, magnificent grounds, Empire furniture—the pomp and glitter of circumstance. . . . Karl used to tease her.

"Such extravagant tastes, Fräulein! . . . How shall you ever satisfy them?"

Karl! . . . What would she have been without Karl? What would she have been! Tucked off in the

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wilderness with Mammy—the nearest neighbors the Dentons!

There were the books in the great house, to be sure, and Mammy's fund of reminiscence to bring life within touch of one's finger tips, but Karl had brought her things she could grasp, lay hold on . . . There had been Mr. Huntley, of course. *Had* been. It was strange how of the past he seemed. More and more some intangible thing pushed him into a shadowy background. Had it been her fault or was it because he had wished it? His visits to Laguna Vista had become fewer and fewer after Karl had come. And when he did run up on occasion for a brief visit he seemed more and more to avoid her. He had grown strangely silent in her presence, too. How many times by a quick, sudden movement she had startled him out of an absorbed contemplation of her. He used to draw back like a dreamer roused—a dreamer upon the threshold of a secret that lay just out of his grasp. She felt the constraint, too, and withdrew more and more. She was no longer the bold little girl who had called out to him through a break in the cypress hedge. She still felt that in trouble he would be a good man to go to —up to a point. But, only up to a point. There would be things that Dustin Huntley would not understand. What these things were she could not say. Whereas Karl would understand everything. There were things that she could never tell Dustin Huntley; there was nothing she could not tell Karl.

Karl had been mysterious to-night and Adrienne felt a little gust of the unknown ruffle her content. But merely in passing. The champagne had given new

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wings to happiness. She had sipped it sparingly, a half glass at the most, but it had released hitherto timid expectations. Anything seemed within grasp, now. The mellowness of her mood helped to color the scene before her. For the first time since her arrival she thought Mrs. Forsythe altogether charming, sitting beside the silver coffee urn, attending to the wishes of her guests. A less adroit hostess would have left even this last detail to the servants. But Justine Forsythe knew the value of a final impression—how to quicken the suave formality of dinner with a tangible symbol of hospitality. "One lump? . . . Two?" She was like a princess granting a favor. At a side table Jed Forsythe made his gesture of cordiality, pouring liqueurs into glasses shaped like inverted morning-glories. Two Chinese servants stood waiting, just apart from the general movement, with that air of detachment that only Orientals can achieve. Not dressed in the ridiculous silks affected by Chinese attendants in tourist hotels, but in the stiff white ducks of real service. They were Jed's contribution to the *mise en scène*. His affection for the old-fashioned type of West-coast servants had withstood the new mode of imported continental butlers with their airs of haughty condescension. Adrienne liked Jed Forsythe. He didn't have any superlative degree of intelligence and he made no pretense in that direction. He liked hunting, polo, dogs, good liquor and his wife. And there he rested his excuse for existence. A comfortable person to live with—brusque and kindly, narrow and tolerant, with amazing inconsistency.

Around these two centers of hospitality—Justine and

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Jed Forsythe—the guests revolved like puppets set in motion by the heat of a lantern. A company of infinite contrasts. Karl, for instance, with his sleek, golden hair; the great Kajetan, black browed and florid. For the moment Forrest Deering was engaged in a mild flirtation with Conchita Emory which left Bess Forsythe a free rein with Karl. Bess Forsythe and Karl. . . . Adrienne felt stirred to a vague rancour. Mrs. Deering was sitting apart, alone, looking on with an expression of bored amusement. "What barbarians!" she was probably thinking from the depths of her metropolitan soul. The other guests fitted into the general pattern with inconspicuous harmony. Only one figure stood out—Jane Witherspoon. Not because she was arresting, but because she was so ineffective. Adrienne watched her fluttering from group to group, pathetically trying to achieve recognition. She met with no actual rebuffs—on the contrary they accepted her too completely, too casually. She would stand with an expression of eager participation in their conversation that became more and more strained until, with a little sigh of defeat, she would marshal her courage and pass on to the next. It was inevitable that, in the end, she should search out Adrienne.

"Bored, already?" She slipped into a seat beside Adrienne, nervously clicking her fan.

"Oh, dear, no! . . . I'm just looking on."

"Let me get you some coffee and a liqueur—they'll miss you completely back here."

Adrienne put out a restraining hand. "Don't . . . I'm not used to coffee after dinner."

Jane Witherspoon cleared her throat. "Do you mind

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—my sitting here, I mean? . . . I'm so tired of meeting the same people over and over again."

"Mind? . . . Why, I was hoping some one would find me."

Jane Witherspoon settled back in her seat with grateful composure. "Let me see . . . you'll forgive me, of course. But the other day when I first met you I didn't quite catch your name."

Adrienne hesitated, as she always did over an answer to this question. "Parsons," she said finally with challenging distinctness. "Adrienne Parsons."

"Parsons," Jane Witherspoon reflectively repeated. . . . "Oh, yes, of course! . . . I was wondering what made the name so familiar! . . . There used to be a character in San Francisco. Old Selina Parsons. Everybody was afraid of her. She was always testifying in will contests."

Adrienne felt her heart quicken. What should she do? Remain silent, protest or simply state her position? She decided to choose the most dignified way out of the difficulty. "Selina Parsons is my foster mother," she said quietly.

A quick flash of embarrassment spread over Jane Witherspoon's face. "Forgive me! . . . I was only repeating idle gossip. I dare say not a word they say of her is true. It's usually that way. . . . Have you ever heard Kajetan play?"

"No. . . . I have never heard any one play . . . no great performer, I mean."

"This is your first visit to San Francisco?"

"Yes. . . . I live at Laguna Vista . . . near Lakeview . . . on the old Sinclair place."

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"You'll excuse me—but Selina Parsons, is she dead?"

"No. . . . She lives at Laguna Vista, too."

Jane Witherspoon opened her fan wide and gazed down upon the Watteau scene painted upon it. "I had no idea you were related to the Forsythes." She looked up quickly. "And yet, I might have known. Your eyes . . . the way you carry yourself . . . your—"

"But I'm not related to the Forsythes," Adrienne broke in. She stopped to feel the way to her next statement. Jane Witherspoon flushed again. "Selina Parsons manages the ranch at Laguna Vista. I live with her. You see, she was a *great* friend of old Judge Sinclair."

"Really, was she! . . . I didn't know. . . . That proves what people say of her isn't true. . . . From what I've heard Judge Sinclair was a very fine man. . . . I never really knew him. But he was one of the trustees of a school for girls that I attended. I watched him many times drive up for meetings. Often he talked to us. . . . I used to wish that he was my father."

Adrienne gave an inquiring look. "Ah, then you've been lonely, too."

"Yes."

Suddenly the necessity for speech was shattered. Contacts of understanding had been mysteriously established. Jane Witherspoon kept on clicking her fan. They sat in silence until one of the Chinese servants stepped upon the platform and lifted the lid of the piano.

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"He's going to play," Jane Witherspoon whispered.

"Shall we sit nearer?" asked Adrienne politely.

"Don't you think this is nice here?"

Adrienne assented.

Presently Kajetan mounted the platform. The hum of conversation instantly ceased. He stood leaning carelessly against the piano. There was the look of the artist in his face—half condescending, half contemptuous. A powerful man with sensitiveness playing about his vibrating nostrils. Thick, sensuous lips; teeth, brutal and sharp. He announced a group of Bohemian folk themes adapted for the piano by himself. His voice was deep and winning and he spoke with a faint trace of English accent, choosing his words with fastidious accuracy. Then he sat down to play.

The first fragment of the group left Adrienne disappointed. A simple little air done without flourish. Exquisite, of course, but, to a person without experience enough for discrimination, quite lacking in special luster. "I'd much rather hear Karl!" was her mental comment. . . . But the second number quickened her tepid interest. This finished with a promise of brilliance and swept quickly on to the third. A slow, minor movement at first, livening suddenly until it achieved such a dazzling tempo that it left Adrienne breathless. From that moment he held her—shaking her soul to almost unwilling rapture. She found herself floating up, up: meeting him in a curious emotional contact. . . . When he finished a frenzy of applause shook the room. The guests began to crowd forward. Adrienne came out of a thick dream to find that even

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Jane Witherspoon was moving toward the platform where Kajetan stood smiling ironically and acknowledging the applause with the faintest nod of the head. Adrienne felt stifled. She rose unsteadily. . . . Gradually she recovered her composure. She remembered that the music-room opened into a conservatory. If she could achieve the conservatory without being conspicuous! She felt herself drifting toward it. Once in the doorway she turned and looked back. Kajetan was paying not the slightest attention to the people in front of him. He was looking at her!

* * *

The conservatory off the music-room was one of the original features of the Sinclair mansion that Justine Forsythe had left undisturbed. It was an expression of the old bonanza age when every San Francisco mansion worthy of the name boasted a conservatory. In the eighties this had been the final seal of luxury as well as refinement. Palms, begonias, umbrella and rubber plants, ranged tier upon tier. In the center, above three porcelain basins, was the figure of a fat child clutching a struggling carp. From the carp's mouth issued a thin stream of water which trickled over the fluted rims of the basin and fell into a pool below. A circular seat of marble surrounded the pool.

Adrienne stepped into the half-gloom of this retreat and sank upon the marble seat. The air was warm and humid, full of sickly perfumes. The hum of voices from the adjoining room stopped suddenly. Kajetan began to play again. This time one of Chopin's nocturnes. Wistful and haunting. Restfully done.

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Something to soothe after the crashing disquiet of his former performance. . . . Adrienne felt vaguely that he could have found a way to play even this until it was charged with agitation. He was above the composition he interpreted. Or rather, he gave it any interpretation he chose. His task was to sway people; to quicken or quiet. And he could make a mazurka restful or a cradle song disturbing—if he set his mind to it. Taking liberties with the time, Karl called it. But only a great artist had the right to do that. The music flowed on limpidly, its clamorous moment sonorous instead of loud. It rippled and sometimes thundered, but it was the restful thunder of waves. This time the applause was appreciative but unemotional. Adrienne sat staring down into the cool drip of the pool. She had never felt so tranquil. Quietly her mind slipped back to the musky coolness of the fig grove at Laguna Vista. . . . Turkeys slinking through the shade . . . Mammy parting the gloom. Mammy slender and bronze like a turkey without its iridescences. . . . All the things that had first flashed across her consciousness: fig trees, over-ripe fruit falling plummet-wise, chickens, bronzed turkeys, the brown slenderness of Mammy, white kerchiefs, golden ear-hoops, a moss-agate brooch. . . . Not in this precise sequence but merged, blurred, softly fused, like a faint pastel.

Peering into a well of the past; groping back, even beyond origin. Feeling the way to mysteries . . . upon the brink of revelation . . . sensing something intangible, vital, bound to her.

She drew back, shivering.

* * *

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Out in the music-room the company was breaking up into little groups again. Kajetan had descended from the platform. Adrienne, standing in the doorway, saw him search the room. His eyes fell on her. He came toward her, conspicuously, deliberately, quite ignoring Justine Forsythe's beckoning finger.

"Ah," he cried, "so I have finally caught you! . . . The little lady who runs away from my music." He frowned playfully.

"I couldn't stand it. . . . Something—" She stopped fighting back the tears in her eyes.

"Was it like that—as beautiful as that?" She nodded. "Did you hear the Chopin number? . . . I knew you were listening in there. I could feel it. And so I played that just for you. . . . What is your name?"

Again that silly question—that inevitable question. "Adrienne."

"Adrienne! . . . How charming . . . that was my mother's name. She was French, you see. . . . Mrs. Forsythe tells me you sing."

"A little . . . a very little . . . German songs mostly."

"Nothing but German songs? . . . And you an American? . . . We must teach you something else. A girl named Adrienne singing only German songs! What nonsense!"

She drew herself up "I like them," she answered with that simple dignity she could put into a vital statement.

Kajetan's eyes twinkled in spite of himself. "Why?"

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"Because they are very beautiful. . . . And because my dearest friend taught them to me."

He looked at her with a strange, searching gravity. "You are quite right, my child. . . . And, now, will you sing one for me?"

"Here? . . . Before everybody? . . . Oh, no! I couldn't do that!"

"Not if I play for you? . . . Come, you are not gracious."

"Very well. . . . I shall be frightened, but if you ask me—"

"What songs do you sing? . . . Schubert perhaps?"

"Oh, nothing that ambitious. The simplest things."

A twinkle of humor gleamed in his eye. *The Lorelei,* perhaps."

He was laughing at her. She rebuffed him with a cool: "Yes. . . . *The Lorelei,* if you please."

The gleam in his eye changed to admiration. "Good, I can play that accompaniment. . . . Let us begin."

She caught her breath and followed him. Once upon the platform he raised his hands for silence. She could see the inquiring eyes turned in her direction; Mrs. Forsythe's expression of definite amusement; Karl looking a little frightened.

"Ladies and gentlemen: I am appearing for the next number in a new rôle—accompanist to this charming little lady who will sing for you. She has chosen a German song—*The Lorelei.* Because she thinks this song very beautiful and because it was taught her by her dearest friend. If you will give us your attention, please."

She looks straight at Karl. . . . To look straight

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at him is her only salvation. What madness! . . . What can Mrs. Forsythe be thinking? And there is Bess sneering. . . . Kajetan has commenced. How well he plays it. . . . She is to meet Karl, to-morrow . . . all day at the Exposition together . . . she and Karl . . . Because she thinks this song beautiful and because it was taught her by her dearest friend . . . how clever of Kajetan! . . . Something troubling Karl . . . Something on his mind . . . she will sing for him . . . dear Karl . . . for him alone.

* * *

"A voice? . . . Decidedly a voice! . . . But something infinitely greater—feeling and courage . . . Courage, great courage! The first requisite of any artist."

It is Kajetan answering Justine Forsythe.

Adrienne is still dazed.

Praise from the great Kajetan. . . . But why does Karl look so disapproving . . . so sad?

Doesn't he know that she was singing for him . . . just for him?

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Chapter Seven

A JULY morning breaking cloudless . . . an unusual thing at this season for San Francisco. The bay still and calm . . . the air new washed as if dipped in the sea . . . the faint perfumes of heliotrope and sweet peas and nasturtiums coming from the gardens.

Adrienne left the Sinclair mansion early for her tryst with Karl. He had suggested calling for her but she had wanted to achieve a destination in San Francisco by herself. And it was such a simple matter, no trick at all to dip down the Fillmore Street hill and find oneself at the main gate of the Exposition. She bought her ticket and clicked through the gate, walking rapidly to the Court of Honor. Karl had said "ten o'clock" but Adrienne had come a half hour earlier. She wanted to think over the events of the night before.

It was curious how Kajetan had walked into her consciousness . . . given her courage to do a daring thing. And to mount the platform in the Sinclair music-room and sing had been daring. She knew that now. But for Kajetan, she would have had a sense of failure, of having been ridiculous. The applause that had followed her song had been nothing save a polite patter and the looks that the guests threw at her as she stood making a tremulous little bow had been either amused or hostile. . . . Who was this child that had the bad taste, the impudence to put herself upon the same platform with the great Kajetan? That was what

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their glances had implied. Her heart had sunk. She had felt humiliated.

But almost at once had come Kajetan's words to raise her again. *Courage . . . great courage . . . the first requisite of any artist.*

He had known how much pluck it had taken to answer his challenge. That's what had pleased her. To have him understand that she was not bold, nor pushing, nor self-satisfied. That she had a voice . . . that she would be an artist: these were of lesser moment. Because she knew these things herself, because she had known them always. . . . *Tassels on my boots! Tassels on my boots!* Had she not swayed imaginary audiences from the veranda of the Big House? Yes . . . she did not need Kajetan's word for that.

The Court of Honor was dazzling in the ripe sunshine. Banners lifted lazily . . . a blush of pink and blue hydrangea bloom in the sunken gardens . . . pigeons wheeling in amorous clouds upward toward cornice and minaret and back to earth again. . . . Through Greek pillars the bay, purple and somnolent. Smooth and purple like the sky at night. Without a fold, without a crease. Sly and deceitful, pretending that it could be gentle forever. Glooming cliffs on the Marin shore turned to tawny gold . . . midsummer gold . . . slightly veiled in a molten haze. . . . A riot for the senses. Adrienne felt charged with a voluptuous ferment. It was too lovely! . . . A dream. She wanted to touch beauty, to feel it—with her hands, her lips. She wanted to press it close to her heart.

She turned from the gilded vision of the hills and walked slowly through a walled avenue toward the Art

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Palace. A quieter, more pensive loveliness this. A thing for night. She never would forget the moment she had first beheld the Art Palace, rising pearl-like in a fictitious moonlight. She had not believed it. Strange, mysterious, eerie . . . enshrining beauty and yet releasing it. Melancholy and poignant. Even the freshness of morning could not lift its charm to complete reality. But it was less sad, less ineffable.

This was the first time she had come in the early morning hours to the Fair grounds. Except for attendants and gardeners repairing the ravages of yesterday's crowds the avenues were deserted. She preferred it so. . . . How like Karl to suggest a quieter hour with which to begin their day! Previously she had come with the Forsythes. Only once had Karl been along. And this time he had seemed a part of a strange picture into which she did not fit. She knew such a feeling was ridiculous—that it was only because, in the solitude of Laguna Vista, she had grown to think of Karl as peculiarly something that belonged to her . . . something not to be shared with others. To-day, then, was to be a happy day without a cloud. Selfish and happy! That is what she would be—after she had discovered what was troubling Karl. First they must brush away all the cobwebs . . . then, happiness, complete and final.

There was Karl, already waiting for her. Standing by a gay little kiosk, where they sold peanut brittle and cold soda pop . . . Flowers, wheeling pigeons, the still sea, gilded hillsides—peanut brittle and soda pop. How ridiculous! For a moment she felt cross, annoyed.

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Then, she began to laugh. She was still laughing when she came up to him.

"Ah, Fräulein, you are as I like to see you—happy!"

"It is so funny . . . all these beautiful things . . . and, then, this." She pointed to the kiosk.

"People must eat and drink, Fräulein."

She made a wry face. "Always . . . always must they?"

"You will see for yourself at noon time."

"I'll not be hungry, I promise you. . . . If I am, I'll eat roses."

"Ah, but you are young, Fräulein!"

She wagged her head mockingly. "And you—you are so old!"

He fell in with her banter. "We shall see—we shall see at the noon hour!"

She drew him over to a bench and they sat down in front of a lagoon. Black swans were ruffling the water.

"And, now, tell me," she said, "what is troubling you."

"Troubling me, Fräulein?"

"Yes. . . . There is something on your mind."

"How did you guess? . . . You are growing up and no mistake! No mood escapes a woman."

"But you must tell me."

"Let us have a happy day together."

"Is—is it that bad?"

"Peanut brittle and soda pop among the palaces, Fräulein. That is all."

"Something ridiculous?"

"Yes . . . something ridiculous. . . . What shall we do first?"

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"Let's sit here and watch the swans."

"Dear Fräulein!"

"Dear, dear Karl!"

* * *

Twelve o'clock and they were still sitting before the lagoon. The swans had drifted lazily away and were sunning themselves on a sloping lawn. A breeze had risen, lazy but strong enough to lift the longest pennant.

All morning talking . . . or being silent for long stretches. Complete understanding.

"At this rate, Fräulein, you shall never see the exhibits."

"This is so much nicer. Who wants to know how breakfast food is made?"

"Ah, but there are mammoth plums in glass jars . . . and wheat kernels as large as orange seeds . . . and over there is the Art Palace filled with pictures."

"I saw some of those, yesterday . . . pictures, I mean. We went into the Hungarian room. I never thought such people existed. They were worse than the Dentons."

"Realism, my dear child . . . the new school."

Adrienne swept the immediate foreground with an inclusive arm. "But this is real, too."

"Yes . . . this is real, too . . . but at an effort. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think so. . . . Ugly things are not so difficult."

"You must remember that . . . while you are learning to be a great artiste."

"That's all nonsense," she said lightly. "What Kajetan said last night. He was just being kind."

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"No, Fräulein, it was not all nonsense. . . . And you know it was not. He was right—quite right. Some people are born that way. . . . It is a great privilege—and a burden, too. . . . For an artist must be sensitive almost to a point of weighing a moonbeam. . . . And yet he must fight and take blows and never give up—*never!*"

"Kajetan is an artist. Do you think he is *that* sensitive? I like him but there is something cruel about him."

"Sensitive people can be cruel. . . . It is an armor they put on. Sensitive people are often cowards. . . . And they are often vain."

"If I must be all those things I shall not be an artiste."

He drew back, studying her. "How little you know, Fräulein! How little you know how impossible it is to escape chains!"

She laughed. "How dreadful you are to-day! Well, you'll see how I'll fool you. . . ."

He shook his head. "No, you will not fool me. . . . Sometimes I think I should never have encouraged you to sing. A voice used before its time is very often injured. It is too precious a thing to trifle with."

"Nonsense. . . . I would have been singing anyway. Didn't Mammy teach me 'Tassels on My Boots' long before you came? And Mr. Huntley. He taught me 'Pretty Isabella.' If you hadn't come my voice would have been cracked absolutely. And how would I have ever had the courage to sing for Kajetan if you hadn't taught me *something!* . . . Why, I didn't know any-

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thing about anything, until you came. . . . Why, Karl, dear, you brought the whole world to me."

He looked away. "The world would have come to you anyway. . . . It does to some people."

"Karl, dear, shall I tell you a secret? . . . I'm starving!"

"Shall we look up a rose-bush?"

She shook her head.

"Peanut brittle and soda pop?"

"Something hot."

"Scones and jam and tea?"

"No. Don't laugh. A hot dog."

His eyes twinkled. "And beer, Fräulein!"

"Beer? . . . I'm not sure." She pretended to draw back. "Perhaps if we found a rose-bush—"

"Nonsense. . . . A hot dog is much more beautiful than a rose at mid-day."

"Realism . . . the new school," she mocked.

"Precisely. . . . There is room in the world for everything!"

* * *

The zone: a completely hideous lane of side shows intent on giving the lie to beauty of any kind. A disconsolate place unless it was filled with throngs. The barkers and ticket sellers looked dispirited. The public wasn't responding as they had hoped. Only entertainment with a pornographic tinge was getting over.

"Stella—have you seen Stella? . . . A dime, ten cents!" A long queue of waiting males, before the shrine of Stella, indulging in sly winks and nudges.

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"And who is Stella?" asked Adrienne.

"Merely the picture of an undraped lady. . . ."

"Ten cents to see that!" cried Adrienne. "The Art Palace is full of them."

"Ah, but this is different. . . . A darkened room . . . a picture lighted skillfully. . . . Not a work of art at all. Just a colored photograph."

"Not really!"

"Not really a photograph. But the spirit of the thing . . . I'm afraid I can't explain."

"I know what you mean."

"Another kind of realism."

Hula dancers . . . alligator farms . . . scenic railways. Mexican villages . . . Chinese chop-suey joints imported from New York . . . two-headed calves . . . wheels of fortune . . . mind readers . . . all the froth and filth and fantasy of recreation strung into a crooked mile. At last the restaurant, a reproduction of the Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone Park. Why, one couldn't imagine. A huge place with an air of being always completely deserted.

Karl ordered. Frankfurters . . . sauerkraut . . . potato salad . . . beer . . . black bread. Adrienne pretended to be aghast. The beer came first . . . in stone mugs. Adrienne sipped cautiously and made a wry face.

"What is the matter, Fräulein?"

"People don't like such stuff! . . . surely!"

In answer he drained his stein dry. The waiter bustled up.

"Another!" cried Karl.

Adrienne sipped again, shivering.

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"I am disappointed, Fräulein. . . . For the first time in your life you fail me."

She took another sip. "Give me time . . . at first . . . you can't expect me to like it at first!"

"You did not shiver last night at champagne!"

Adrienne released an exquisite sigh. "Ah, champagne! . . . That was different!"

"Now I know you will one day be a prima donna! . . . They have always those expensive tastes. . . . Where will your poor Karl be then? . . . Shivering at the stage door, with only enough money to buy you a cheese sandwich and a mug of beer. . . . While you sweep by me on the arm of some Chilean coffee planter who can afford champagne and diamonds!"

"Karl . . . how horrid of you! . . . A nasty Chilean coffee planter out of the movies . . . I know!"

"The scene will be Monte Carlo . . . I have gone there with my last hundred lire to try and win a fortune . . . so that I can buy you champagne. . . . You are singing at the Opera House: *Thaïs* a wicked rôle. I stake all but ten lire and lose. . . . Ten lire saved to buy you a cheese sandwich and a mug of beer before I blow out my brains. I wait for hours, biting my finger nails to the quick. At last the door opens. My heart beats fast. A man is with you. It is all over."

"And so you throw yourself in front of us, put a pistol to your temple, and pull the trigger. . . . How lovely!"

Karl began calmly on his second drink. "Nothing of

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the sort. . . . I fly to the nearest café and order two cheese sandwiches and two mugs of beer."

"And this is all?"

"Surely. . . . No man could commit suicide after two mugs of beer."

"Pouf! . . . I am glad I went with the Chilean planter."

"How old are you, now, Fräulein?"

"What a question to ask a young lady. . . . Seventeen, next month."

"You were fourteen when I first saw you. . . . How grown up you are! . . . Still you were never a child . . . never quite."

"What do you mean?"

"You understood so many things from the first." He snapped his fingers. "Like that! Once you said to me: I understand everything you say. I know what words mean by their sound. . . . I have always known. . . . Do you remember?"

"Yes—that day on the veranda of the Big House. . . . You were telling me about the White Ball. . . . I *did* know everything you said. But that was only because you made it seem so real. . . . Mrs. Forsythe took me down to the country house last week. I stood upon the terraces and thought of nothing but the White Ball. The very words you used came back to me. . . . The moon . . . stately white peacocks . . . fauns . . . dryads . . . Greek maidens dancing into the night. . . . All, all in white! The place was heavenly in the sunshine. What must it be at night!"

"You were not disappointed, then? . . . Everything has been up to expectations?"

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"Everything but Bess Forsythe. I always remembered that lovely impression you gave of her—in an exquisite gown of chiffon and pearls and swan's-down . . . floating like a dream-swan upon the pool of night. . . . I thought she would be dainty, fragile, and sweet. She is none of those things."

"The moon plays tricks, Fräulein. . . . Hasn't she been nice?"

"Horrid."

"She is too near your age. . . . You disturb her security."

"She's in love with you, Karl dear."

"Hush. . . . What nonsense!"

"It is true." She gave a little, teasing laugh. "Remember, I'm grown up now."

"What do you know about love?"

"What don't I know about it? . . . I've always been in love with somebody. . . . First it was with Mr. Huntley. . . . And then you came! . . . How jealous I used to be of everybody! . . . How I hated people who even talked to you! . . . And you never suspected."

"Mr. Huntley and then me . . . What a fickle little jade! . . . Who is next on the list? . . . Kajetan?

"A fatherly old soul like him? . . ."

"If he could only hear that!"

"You know what I mean! . . . He'd always be miles high. . . . I couldn't touch him as I touch you, Karl dear. . . . How old were you when you had your first love affair?"

"Somewhere around five years old. . . . She was a

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lovely lady with little yellow ringlets plastered about her forehead. And she came to the house to make gowns for my mother. . . . She used to give me spools of bright silk thread to play with. . . . I adored her!"

"And were you miserable, too?"

"Yes . . . whenever the day came for her to leave, I used to go out into a corner of the garden and weep. . . . Once I stuck my head in the fountain. It was horrible! . . . There is nothing so tragic as the love affairs of a child. . . . Grown-ups can talk the thing over with some one. . . . But a child—a child has too much pride."

"Karl . . . I have a confession to make! . . . I have drunk up every drop of my beer . . . while we were talking. Fancy that!"

"Waiter . . . zwei bier!"

"Oh, no! . . . no more! . . . I just wanted you to know."

"Too late, Fräulein. I've given the order. . . . Besides, it helps conversation. . . . What shall we talk about next?"

"Your plans. . . . What will you be doing . . . now that the Exposition is finished?"

She caught a startled gleam in his eyes. "Laguna Vista is still on the map."

There was evasion in his tone. She hadn't the courage to force him into a corner. "The garden must be lovely, up there," she hazarded lamely.

"I hope so. . . . Mrs. Forsythe has finally decided to go up and have a look at it after Bud gets back from Harvard."

"He's due to-day. . . . I heard them talking about

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it at breakfast this morning. . . . What is he like?"

"Like? . . ." Karl came out of a half reverie with a start. "Like a certain picture at the Big House, the same dull-red hair, the same full lips . . . the same deep-blue eyes."

"Not his great-grandfather . . . not Mr. Howard!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I should like him to be like that."

"Well, Fräulein, you shall have your wish."

"His great-grandfather was a gambler . . . an unsuccessful one."

"That's what most gamblers are, Fräulein."

"But they take risks . . . that's what I like about them!"

"Shall we go out into the sunshine again?"

"Yes. . . . Let's."

The gilded morning had vanished utterly. In its place a clean-swept afternoon. A trade wind was ruffling the bay and lifting the banners and pennants to far-flung rapture. The Marin shore was no longer tawny but had turned gray. A hint of night mist was in the air. But in the walled, shut-in courts the sun still beat down with hot gayety and sunshades blossomed like gigantic jungle flowers.

"What now?" asked Karl.

"Must I see exhibits?"

"It would be desirable, Fräulein."

She brought her lips together in a pout. "Very well, then . . . but I shall hate it."

"Let me see. . . . We might dance."

"Dance!" Her eyes were shining.

"Yes . . . every afternoon from three to six . . .

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in the California Building. Every one you ever heard of will be there."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly three."

She caught his arm and made as if to run. "Come on!"

"Tut—tut—Fräulein. An old man like me! . . . What will people think?"

"Come on!"

He darted swiftly forward and left her behind, choked with short breath and laughter. She came up to him. "An old man like you! . . . Just for that you'll have to dance every dance with me."

"That is a promise, Fräulein!"

They took the open walk along the yacht harbor. The wind tore past them gayly. Groups of bewildered strangers, in palm beach suits and thin dresses, unaccustomed to such caprices of weather in July, were fleeing from the sharp bite of the breeze.

"Ah, this San Francisco!" cried Karl. "You can never depend upon her! . . . This morning still and hot and languorous. And, now, look! . . . As capricious as a woman."

"Capricious as a woman! . . . I like that, after all my years of constancy."

"Constancy! . . . Huntley . . . von Stralendorf . . . Kajetan. . . . Before the afternoon is over we shall all, no doubt, be in the discard."

"And what about men, pray? . . . Yourself? . . . In love at five with a seamstress and her yellow ringlets. You are still constant to her, I suppose!"

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"With you here, Fräulein! . . . Now, how can you be so absurd?"

"Isn't it lovely? All the nonsense we have talked to-day? . . . We've never been so gay and foolish before."

"It is just what I wished for to-day. . . . It is just as I want to remember it."

"Hush, Karl. Don't talk about remembering. It makes it all seem so over . . . so finished. And it's only just begun. Think, I'm grown up, now. Before, I was just a silly little child. We never laughed and joked and talked nonsense before. . . . Oh, we had gay times—like going for Christmas trees and that! . . . But this—this is different!"

She saw his thin white teeth press sharply against his lower lip. Then he laughed, nervously. "Yes . . . this is different," was all he said.

But by the time they had reached the cloistered gardens of the California Building he had recovered his gayety.

"Every dance!" he cried, shaking his finger at her. "Remember!"

* * *

They stood a moment in the shadow of the Mission tower while Karl waved his walking stick toward the remnants of a clipped cypress hedge and said:

"Attention, Fräulein! You are now gazing upon the one and only bit of previously planted garden on the whole grounds. . . . That hedge and those weeping willows were once an old bathing resort called Harbor View. . . . They tell me that, in the eighties,

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the old German residents used to come here for hot salt tub-baths. Can you imagine anything quainter! . . . Hot salt-water tub-baths . . . and after—steamed clams; cracked crab; chowder and beer . . . at tables under the willow trees. Funny old zinc tubs! . . . You should have seen them when they were wrecked. The eighties, did I say? . . . Later even than that . . . almost until we cleared ground. What simple souls our fathers were! . . . They must have been far happier, too."

"Happier! . . . How you do talk—could any one be happier than we are, now, this minute?"

"This minute? . . . Yes, Fräulein, you are right, as usual."

"I think the past is always a little silly."

"That's what makes us so tolerant of it. . . . I see, you do not like my funny old garden. That hedge was really a maze. A maze like the one that led to Rosamond's bower. . . . Rosamond's bower and zinc bath-tubs. . . . Now, what do you say to that?"

"I say it is time to commence dancing."

"Exactly. . . . Let us go in."

They walked along a patio, heavy with the scent of blossoming lemon trees.

"And, now, Fräulein, may I be permitted one more ironic observation? Out here: monastic calm—in effect. We walk along cloistered corridors. Everything —the enclosure . . . the garden . . . is to prepare our minds for solitude, for peace. . . . When, in truth we are in quest of the tango. . . . Rosamond's maze and zinc bath-tubs, cloistered gardens leading to a dance hall. . . . Life is always irrelevant, grotesque."

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"Karl, quit being unhappy. . . . I shall be in tears in a moment."

"A perfect preparation for the dance. . . . Ah, here we are, at last! . . . But such a crowd, Fräulein! . . . I forgot. It is Saturday."

A jam indeed! . . . Adrienne let Karl edge his way to an uncrowded corner, towing her by the hand. A marimba band was swinging into a one-step. Shop-girls, stenographers. Insurance clerks. Teamsters. High-school pupils. Army officers. Society buds. Club women. Democracy in its most genial mood. And, everybody in the general swirl looking extraordinarily of a piece. The word jazz invented but not yet practiced openly. One-step . . . the rag . . . tangoes. . . . Hobble skirts just coming in . . . flappers yet in embryo . . . lip-stick showing timorously . . . bobbed hair unheard of. . . . In short, nineteen hundred and fifteen—commencement year for the age of bastard sophistication.

But Adrienne was thrilled. And a little terrified, too, at the prospect of dancing publicly . . . in such a jam.

"Well, Fräulein, why should we waste time?"

"In a minute, Karl dear. . . . I'm all out of breath."

"Let us sit at one of the tables. . . . Only I warn you—no champagne here . . . nothing but lemonade and things without sparkle."

They sat down. "Do you know Karl, I'm frightened about dancing. . . . At the big house with you it was different: alone—the veranda all to ourselves. . . . And they don't dance as we do at all."

"The one-step! . . . A mere nothing, Fräulein. . . .

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Once around the floor you have it. . . . The American dancing is savagery. Tom-tom-tom! Like a jungle wardance. Simple, primitive, childish."

"Let us wait till they play a waltz."

"Whatever you wish."

The band slides into the reigning song-hit. Everybody sings as they dance. Shuffle, shuffle; swing, swing; glide, glide. Rhythm, rhythm, rhythm—monotonous, exact, contagious.

> You wore a tulip, a bright yellow tulip,
> And I wore a red, red rose.

Adrienne's shoulders begin to sway.

"Already, Fräulein! . . . It is a disease! . . . An American disease, this dancing with the shoulders."

"Don't you like it?"

"I adore it!"

"Then, why do you grumble so?"

"Because it is inelegant! . . . There is no manner to it. It is fascinating and demoralizing."

"You might have taught it to me! . . ."

"I have already explained: one does not need to learn it. . . . It is pure instinct—like feeding and singing and loving."

"Some one is waving to you, Karl. . . . No, at the second entrance. . . . See, coming this way . . . a man."

Karl stands up. "Naturally . . . of course . . . can you imagine, Fräulein? . . . Bud Forsythe!"

The music stops. . . . Bud Forsythe! . . . Adrienne comes to her feet.

* * *

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"Karl, you old egg you! . . . What's the big idea? . . . Pulled in on the Limited at eleven. . . . Simply had to run over and see the fun. I call this keen, meeting you right off. Mom's on the grounds somewhere—to a Symphony concert with some sort of a wop. Anyway, he has a funny name. . . . Sis is coming over with a gang later. . . . I say, introduce me! . . . Adrienne! . . . Not the— Well, what do you know about that! Grown up and everything! . . . Why, of course I know who you are. . . . There they go—off in a cloud of dust! . . . You don't tango? . . . Say, tell me something easy. . . . Come on, be a sport! We can fox trot it."

Adrienne was whirled away—speechless, breathless. She hadn't the remotest idea what she was doing—she hadn't time even to be frightened. What was Karl thinking?

"Sometime, when it isn't so crowded, I'll show you the tango. . . . It's keen."

"Will you . . . really!"

"You're dead right, I will. . . . I'll show you this afternoon, if you like. . . . Why, you'd learn in no time at all."

"I'm afraid . . . you see, it would take too long . . . and Karl—"

"Karl! . . ."

"I promised to dance every dance with *him*."

"I like that! . . . Every dance with an old egg like Karl. . . . What's the big idea?"

"Nothing—just a promise."

"Well, you'll simply have to withdraw that motion! . . . Here I am, the prodigal and everything, just

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home. . . . You'll have to pay some attention to me, that's all."

The music stopped.

"Hadn't we better go back?"

"Back! . . . You mean to Karl? . . . Say, how do you get that way?"

"But he's all alone."

"Well, don't worry about Karl. He draws people like molasses draws flies. . . . A keen old egg, I'll say."

"But—"

Adrienne got no further. But Forsythe led her gently but firmly to a table in a remote corner and figuratively sat her down.

"Now, this is what I call getting acquainted. . . . There's one thing I want to know: How did they ever manage to keep you at Laguna Vista all these years? . . . And how did you finally escape?"

Like a certain picture at the big house. The same dull red hair . . . the same full lips . . . the same deep-blue eyes . . .

"Why, I'm visiting your mother. . . . Didn't you know?"

"Really? . . . Well, I call that keen!"

"It's been wonderful . . . the first time I've ever been away from home . . . I'm awfully green."

"You mean you're awfully pretty. . . . Much prettier than your picture . . . the one Karl painted. I knew you right off, though. Adrienne: that's a keen name, too. . . . I'll bet Bess is jealous of you already."

"Why should any one be jealous of me? . . . That's ridiculous."

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"Well, I can give you fifteen reasons. . . . But reasons don't matter with Bess. She's jealous of everybody."

"I don't believe that. . . . If you're fond of some one you're jealous. But just anybody—like me— No, I don't believe it."

"You talk as if you knew all about it . . . Ever been jealous yourself?"

"Haven't you?"

"I asked first."

"Of course!"

"Well, I've never been jealous in my life."

"You've never been truly fond of anybody then."

"Have you?"

"Of course."

"Well, I like that! . . . Who is there at Laguna Vista to be terribly fond of?"

"There's always somebody, *anywhere.*"

"A kid like you!"

"I'm afraid I'm a very curious person."

"Pretty keen, I'd say. . . . What will you drink?"

"Must I?"

"It's expected. . . . We can't park ourselves here unless we order. . . . You can have an ice-cream or a sundae, if you'd rather."

"What would you suggest?"

He ran his finger down the menu card. "What do you say to a *parfait d'amour?* . . . That ought to be appropriate. For a little country girl who is always terribly fond of *somebody.*"

He was almost as much fun as Karl. "Very appropriate," she answered with mock dignity.

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The waiter inclined his ear.
"*Parfait d'amour*—make it two."
"*Two!*" cried Adrienne.
"Yes. . . . It may change my luck."

* * *

Karl was right: there was nothing to the one-step. Once around the hall and you had it. There was little more to the fox-trot. But the tango! Well, in a crowded room you just couldn't get it. But you could do a simple syncopated waltz to the music and squeeze it dry of rhythm. Dancing waltzes and polkas and mazurkas with Karl, about the veranda of the Big House, was a prim performance in comparison with even attempting a tango with Bud Forsythe. And, even if you were uncertain, you felt his competence at once. Just the grasp of his hand reassured you. A large, shapely hand, clean and cool, with little patches of sunbleached hair below the knuckles. And, in spite of your own tallness, you looked up at him. You didn't meet his eyes levelly as you met Karl's. It was fascinating to watch the pupils of these deep-blue eyes widen to violet under the shadows cast by a downward sweep of lashes. And the brisk, masculine odor of tobacco that was like nothing she had ever smelled before. Nothing that suggested old Joe, or Ferguson, or Felix, the Basque shepherd at Laguna Vista, with their vile pipes. Nor Mr. Huntley, who mixed the scent of fragrant cigars with a discreet dash of perfume. Nor even Karl, whose cigarettes left only a faded, burned-out odor. But something pungent and crisp and vigorous—like his speech. And, yet, he really said

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nothing—nothing at all. Even Karl's nonsense was packed with meaning. But Bud Forsythe talked from sheer excess of spirit. "How do you get that way!" What's the big idea?" "Keen, I'd say." "An old egg, like Karl!" You couldn't even resent this last good-natured disparagement of your best friend.

Karl! . . . It wasn't quite fair, running away from him like this. But how could any one oppose Bud Forsythe? And, besides, just as Bud had said, Karl was drawing people like molasses draws flies. The whole gang, as Bud put it. Bess, Conchita Emory, Forrest Deering, Mrs. Clifford Wood . . . later, Mrs. Forsythe and Kajetan.

Bud chuckled. "Husbands and wives conspicuously absent. . . . Even Mom's getting the habit. . . . And a wop, at that!"

Adrienne didn't know what he meant by wop. Bud explained.

"He isn't Italian at all!" she protested. "He's Kajetan, the great Bohemian pianist."

"It's all the same!" Bud dismissed Kajetan with fascinating indifference.

"What time is it?'

"What's the big idea?"

"Why, we can't sit here forever eating *parfait d'amours*. This is the third. . . . I won't be able to eat any dinner."

"Who wants dinner? . . . I'll tell you, we'll get the gang together and speed up the car . . . take a run down to San Jose . . . and back for supper and a dance by eleven o'clock."

"I'm afraid I can't."

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"Can't! . . . How do you get that way?"

"I'm to have dinner with Karl. . . . We planned it days ago."

"That old egg! . . . Why, we'll just kidnap him. Come on, let's crash into them!"

"You mean join the party?"

"Correct."

Adrienne felt relieved. "I'm ready," she answered, rising.

Bud called the waiter and paid the bill.

* * *

Karl saw them coming and jumped up to draw two more chairs into the circle. Karl was a dear: he didn't even give them a reproachful glance.

But Bess said with a vicious drawl: "Well, it's about time!"

Mrs. Forsythe lifted her eyebrows at her son. "So you've discovered Adrienne, too," she observed, a dash of irony in an otherwise sweet tone.

Kajetan took a chair from Karl and placed it between himself and Mrs. Forsythe. He motioned Adrienne to it. "I have been watching you dance. You have a splendid sense of rhythm. That is always a good sign. Every artist should have that."

"Artist! . . . What's the big idea?"

Bess broke in again, her voice thin edged with derisive inflections. "Adrienne is to be an artiste—according to Kajetan."

"A dancer?"

Adrienne answered coolly. "A singer."

"Oh!"

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Forrest Deering looked straight at Adrienne. "And what has that to do with rhythm?"

Kajetan's lip curled contemptuously. "Everything. Rhythm is the basis of all art—of life itself. . . . Love is rhythm . . . creation is rhythm . . . beauty is rhythm."

"How simple and charming," Forrest Deering tossed back gayly. "One could build up an entire philosophy on that."

"As I have," returned Kajetan. "It means complete freedom."

Deering laughed. "Let's drink to rhythm, then."

"In lemonade?" said Karl quietly. "Don't be blasphemous!"

Mrs. Clifford Wood turned to Kajetan. "How long are you staying in San Francisco?"

"Indefinitely. . . . You see my present tour ended in San Francisco. . . . I am awaiting news from the front—from the battlegrounds of Europe."

Bud Forsythe's face quickened. "That sounds keen. What sort of news?"

Adrienne saw Karl compress his lips.

"News favorable to Bohemia."

"Bohemia—she's with Germany, isn't she?"

"Under compulsion, my young friend. . . . But not for long, I hope. . . . Meanwhile, it is necessary for me to wait."

Every one was looking stupidly at Karl. His lips broke into a nervous smile, and he said clearly, "You could not have chosen a more delightful cross-road station."

Kajetan's white teeth flashed with rapier humor.

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"As your presence here attests, my dear Mr. Stralendorf."

"Precisely."

It was Bud who snapped the tension. "Listen, everybody! Adrienne and I are getting up a little motor party . . . to San Jose and return for supper by eleven o'clock. How many in this crowd are game?"

Mrs. Forsythe shook her head. "You, perhaps, my dear Bud. But not Adrienne."

"Thank you, Mrs. Forsythe. . . . I told him it was impossible. But he just kept on insisting."

"You'll find that is Bud's way."

Bud sulked like a schoolboy done out of an hour at the swimming hole. "I don't see why she can't go with me— She was going with Karl—to dinner."

"*Is* going," put in Karl suavely.

"There—you see!"

Mrs. Forsythe took a broken straw out of her lemonade. "Dinner with Karl is different."

"Just because he's an *old* egg!"

"Karl, please forgive my son! . . . Bud, haven't you any manners? You're just like a spoiled child!"

"I'll bet she'd rather go with me! . . . Ask her?"

"Well, Adrienne," Karl commanded teasingly. "Speak up!"

"You're both horrid!" cried Adrienne.

Forrest Deering leaned forward. "Be neutral," he urged, "and dine with me . . . I'm a gay bachelor for the entire evening."

Bess turned to Mrs. Clifford Wood. "Well, the rest of the females here seem to be strictly out of it."

Adrienne colored.

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Mrs. Forsythe gave a dry cough. "Whatever ails this younger generation?"

"We're frank, that's all!" Bess snapped back.

"A very disagreeable virtue." Mrs. Forsythe rose. The rest of the company followed suit.

* * *

Night at the Exposition: a phantom city steeped in flame. The Tower of Jewels glittering and flamboyant like a frosted cake. A transformation scene in a Christmas pantomime, intensified, piled heavenward. A drifting white fog in the channel turned into a million rainbows by the nervous play of searchlights. The Exposition of the circus ring . . . the music halls . . . an extravaganza.

Quiet avenues of soft color. Courtyards dim and mysterious wrapped in clouds of nebulous radiance, pastel shaded. Fountains showering light. Cascades streaming from forgotten niches cunningly illumined. The moist air from the sea ravishing a thousand buds —releasing a thousand perfumes. The hot scent of broom and orange blossoms; the cool sweetness of violet and wallflower. The whole gamut of fragrance run. Blended cunningly together . . . melting at last into the flow of color . . . giving breath to the light. The Exposition of subtle loveliness . . . of the senses.

In the distance across the sad lagoon the Art Palace wrapped in still, pearl-whiteness. Pensive, aloof, poignant. Filled with a hurting beauty. The Exposition of the spirit: eternal, melancholy.

They sat upon the bench where they had begun the day—Karl and Adrienne. The lagoon before them,

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black and motionless. The swans were sleeping, upon a shadowy island, their heads tucked under their ruffled wings. You could see them dreamily outlined against the luminous background of the Art Palace.

"And to think," said Adrienne, "that all this loveliness is to be destroyed—utterly destroyed."

Karl came from a thick musing. "It is so with everything, Fräulein. The lovelier, the swifter the decline."

"Perhaps it only seems swifter?"

"Perhaps."

"We have had a happy day."

"And that is passed—swiftly."

"Not yet," she said. "Not yet." And, as she spoke, she knew from the look in his face that her protest was vain.

"I am going away, Fräulein. . . . In two weeks I shall be gone."

She was watching a truant star from a rocket hovering above the pool. She did not speak until it had trailed downward and was plunged in gloom. Then she said tremulously, "Where?"

"To my own country."

"To war?"

"To war, Fräulein."

"*Must* you?"

"If I wish to preserve my self-respect."

"But you are not strong enough."

"Not a year ago, perhaps . . . but to-day—"

"That is not true, Karl. . . . You know it is not true. You are just as you were a year ago—no better, no worse."

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"But my country is not, Fräulein."

"What do you mean?"

"A year ago my country would have rejected me."

"What is it all about? . . . Why must men fight each other?"

"Because men are cowards! . . . Because men are not brave enough to stop."

"You mean—you don't believe in war?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you go? . . .

"Because I, too, am a coward. . . . Listen, Fräulein, and try to understand. . . . I had a comrade in college. He was a physical giant. He was afraid of nothing. I have just learned his fate. He did not believe in war and, when they came for him, he defied them. They shot him down in front of his door. He had the courage to defy them because he knew that he was not afraid to go to the front. He knew that it was not fear that made him against war. But I, Fräulein, I am afraid of war. . . . When they send me out to the front trenches my tongue will cleave to the dry roof of my mouth. My knees will shake. My forehead will drip agony. . . . Therefore, if I did not go I should always say to myself: 'Karl von Stralendorf, did you remain at home as a protest against war, or because you were afraid of it?' . . . And I should never be able to settle that question. I should never be able to justify myself, Fräulein. And it would drive me mad."

"And is that why men go to war?"

"Some of them. . . . And some because they fear to have others think them cowards. . . . And some

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because they are dumb, driven sheep. . . . And some because they have no imaginations, Fräulein. . . . And all, because it takes courage to stand out against the flock mind."

"I don't understand, Karl dear. Surely it takes courage to face machine guns. And yet you say that all men who fight are cowards."

"No, Fräulein, not quite that. Men who march to the front are often cowards. But men who *stay* there: in spite of cleaving tongues and shaking knees, and foreheads dripping agony, become brave. . . . They are born again—in the baptism of fire. . . . As I shall be, Fräulein, God willing."

"Karl dear, don't! . . . You will break my heart!"

"Dear little Fräulein, forgive me! . . . But I must speak freely once. . . . Only this once. This word with you to-night—here—in this beautiful place, under the stars, is my explanation and my farewell."

"What . . . so soon . . . you mean . . ."

"That I shall not see you again? . . . No, not that, Fräulein. . . . But that we shall perhaps never again be together alone. What the rest think, I do not care. . . . What they have been thinking for all these months, I do not care. . . . The worst of them cannot be more scornful of me than I have been of myself."

"In two weeks, Karl! . . . In two weeks you'll be gone. What shall I do? . . . How shall I get along without you?"

"Forgive me, Fräulein, but I have wondered about that myself. . . . I wondered about it this afternoon, as I watched you—sitting among all those ravening wolves. . . . But you have courage, great courage.

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Kajetan was right. And you shall need it, Fräulein."

"I shall have only Mammy, now."

"A poor shelter, Fräulein. . . . When you were a child—a baby—perhaps she was enough. . . . Such women are tender with children."

"*Such* women. . . . What do you mean?"

"You must know, Fräulein. . . . She has lived an evil life."

"You've been listening to what people say of her."

"Perhaps. . . . But what they say is more than rumor."

"You shouldn't say that about her. . . . She has been the only mother I have known."

"I am not condemning her, Fräulein. . . . But you are no longer a child. You must look at things as they are. Soon you must choose."

"Choose?"

"Yes . . . your course. . . . Let us speak plainly, Fräulein, like the friends who may not see each other for years . . . perhaps ever. . . . One day upon the veranda of the Big House you said things in anger . . . in anger because they called you by a name that you were sure was not yours. . . . You were right: Adrienne Parsons—that *cannot* be your name. Mammy knows it. Yet all accept it smirking, with their tongues in their cheeks. They are like people playing a game. They sit around a table playing their cards, silently. And you are the stake, Fräulein. Why? . . . I do not know. I say again, Mammy has led an evil life. What she plans for you, I cannot say. God grant that it is everything good. . . . If I were here, Fräulein, when the test came, everything would be well. But I shall

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not be here. . . . You should have a full life, Fräulein. Talent is yours . . . and beauty . . . and people love you. You have everything, Fräulein—*everything!*"

"Everything but a name."

"That you shall make for yourself. . . . But, you must fight, Fräulein—alone! That is what makes me sorrowful."

"I know a lot of things, Karl. . . . I know more than you think. . . . I know who my mother was."

"So?"

"Yes. . . . I have guessed it."

"And I have guessed it, too, Fräulein."

"But a mother cannot give me a name."

"I tell you it does not matter."

"Not to a man, perhaps."

"Nor to a woman—of courage. . . . Always remember that, Fräulein. Courage is the only thing in life that matters. . . . Good . . . evil . . . ugliness . . . beauty: they are nothing. . . . It is courage that is the big adventure. It was the adventure that even Christ himself made. . . . It is the adventure that I go back to my country to attempt."

A searchlight, wandering from its course, lit up the huddled bodies of the sleeping swans. They stirred, ruffling their dusky wings as at dawn. And, slowly, majestically, they glided into the water. The crimson glow upon turret and tower began to fade.

"It is time to go, Fräulein."

She stood up. "Karl! . . . Karl! . . ." she cried.

"Good-by, Fräulein! . . . Little Fräulein, farewell!"

He took her brow between his hands and kissed it.

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She turned away. The swans were floating pensively from the shaft of light into blackness.

The warning screech of a siren rent the air. Afar off came the clang of street cars and the shrill cry of newsboys.

Peanut brittle and soda pop among the palaces!

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Chapter Eight

A LETTER from Adrienne to Mammy . . . Mammy reads it over once, twice—again. She chuckles, turns thoughtful. Can it be possible that the ball she has been winding all these years from the skein of misadventure is suddenly to be whirled from her hands and tangled? . . . Within two weeks: a gay company at Laguna Vista—the first since the days of old Judge Washburn Sinclair. And such a company! . . . Justine Forsythe . . . Kajetan . . . Adrienne. *Kajetan!* Of all people. How perfectly chance can work. . . . Or is it Fate? . . . Mammy wonders. How much of the irony and drama in such a situation does Justine Forsythe realize—suspect? . . . How much does she know? . . . For it would be just like her—just like her Sinclair blood—to feel the exhilaration of skirting close to the danger line; to slap fortune in the face and browbeat it by the dash back of her performance. Or to go under smiling as Elizabeth Sinclair had done. Mammy knows the quick heart-leap that accompanies the throw of dice . . . the devil-may-care gesture back of the insolently flung gauntlet . . . the sweetness of short, tense breaths when one fights with back to wall, picking off opponents. In short, the nonchalance of breeding. Who better? . . . Not as a thing from without, to be looked at, to be experienced vicariously. But from within. . . . Not continuously, perhaps, steady and glowing, but in flashes with the intensity of lightning that

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can illuminate far and wistful horizons. The heritage of the Sinclair strain in a lesser breed without the law. A heritage filled with the pathos of swift, intense glimpses of horizons never to be achieved, yet, seen once, through the lightning flash, never to be forgotten. . . . Mixed bloods forever at the fever heat of civil war . . . consuming themselves . . . laying waste happiness—achieving moments of beauty as clashing sabers do in the sunlight.

Sinclair blood! . . . It is a realization that always makes Selina Parsons draw herself up in pride and as quickly snap her teeth together in savage futility. . . . It is a realization that makes her share in a silent, self-satisfied glory and, as quickly, plan dim and enchanting revenges. It is a realization that has made her rear an amber-eyed child with touching fidelity. To what purpose? As if one could answer. As if motives are always crystal clear, always to be disentangled.

* * *

When Selina was sixteen, Adrienne's age, she looked in the glass and said to her reflection:

"Selina, you is different from these other niggers. . . . You is different from your father—from your mother, even. Why? . . . The master lets you do things he won't never let other niggers do. Why? . . . Your father and your mother has the best cabin on the plantation. Why?"

Selina had an inquiring mind. It was not the first time she had thought of such things. But it was the first time that she had put her speculations into such uncompromising, concrete terms. She kept on thinking.

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About that time a child was born to a slip of a girl in the next cabin. Sarah Jackson was the girl's name —a chum of Selina's. Births among the slaves on a plantation were of no great moment. And perhaps this event would have passed unremarked, except that Sarah Jackson died. In the confusion of their grief, the parents of Sarah Jackson talked, made vague threats even, against the man who was responsible for the girl's condition: a white overseer, within the year from New Orleans. Selina kept her ears open. A white father! . . . That was a new idea. . . . She went in one day and looked at the child. It put its hand up to clutch hers—a faintly brown hand that matched exactly the color of Selina's. She left the cabin in a daze of revelation. Suddenly a thousand things that she had never suspected had been made clear to her. She went home and said to her mother:

"Why don't you-all tell Marse Sinclair 'bout this here white man doin' what he done?"

"What you-all talkin' 'bout?" demanded her mother angrily. "You jest better learn right off not ter go botherin' no white man with no nigger's troubles. . . . Don't you never think Marse Sinclair don't know all about it . . ."

"He know all about it? . . . And the Missus, she know, too?"

"She know, but she jest shut her eyes. Like they all do. They is things come too close home for to keep they eyes wide open."

Selina said no more. But her thoughts were busy. And they remained busy. And her ears, likewise. Every day she learned. Two and two, she learned, and

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how to put two and two together. So that on the day she was eighteen she knew her course. It led up the broad steps of Massa's house into his library. He was sipping port and reading a newspaper.

"Ah, Selina, my good girl, and what can I do for you?"

"I wants to be free, Marse Sinclair, that's what."

"Free! . . . Well, God bless my soul! . . . And where did you get that extraordinary notion?"

"Well, I jest 'lowed, Marse Sinclair, you wouldn't want no chile of yours ter be no slave."

He was too surprised to deny her implication. He threatened to have her whipped instead. But she was undaunted. They argued the matter for an hour. In the end, she convinced him, not that it was expedient to be just, but that it was expedient to be rid of a creature who could cut so directly into the heart of an awkward situation.

A few weeks later she left the Sinclair plantation forever—a freed slave. She had fifty dollars in gold in her bosom: her objective was New Orleans.

Almost the first person she ran across in New Orleans was Washburn Sinclair, Massa's youngest son, returning for a holiday from the University of Virginia, where he had gone to study law. Washburn was one of her childhood memories. In dull moments, when his elder brothers had snubbed and deserted him, as elder brothers are wont to do, he had deigned to admit Selina into the charmed circle of his playtime fancies. She had been fleet footed and eager, and she could endure blows with neither protest nor outcry. A good substitute for real boyish companionship.

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He said, "Well, Selina, what's this? . . . Running away?"

"Running away, you say? . . . Well, I guess not. . . . I'm free, Marse Washburn, that's what I is and don't you forgit it."

Washburn Sinclair looked incredulous. "I don't believe you, Selina. . . . But don't worry. I won't say anything."

"*Say!*" she echoed scornfully. "You jest say all you're a mind to. You jest go home and tell your father how you done see me here, down in New Orleans. You see how quick he shut you up."

"You're an impudent nigger, Selina! I've a good mind to—"

"Jest you dare! . . . You make trouble for yourself— That's what I'm a-telling you. . . . And I ain't no nigger, neither. Leastways only one part. . . . The other part's good blood, that's what it is. Jest as good as yours. . . . You ask old Massa hisself, he'll tell you!"

Washburn Sinclair flushed, whether from anger or sudden understanding Selina could not have said. But he left her standing there without further comment. She laughed gayly at his rout. But there was no malice in her mirth, for the simple reason that she adored Washburn Sinclair. And folks she adored she could never have any serious quarrel with.

That night she slept in a wretched lodging-house in the low quarter of the town. She stayed there a week —seeing life. It proved a little more evil than she had expected. But she kept her head. She had Sinclair blood in her and Sinclair blood didn't wallow at

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swill troughs. . . . In the end she said: "Folks that don't know nothing don't git nowhere." But how to learn? That was the rub. . . . She decided to look for work. One day somebody told her, almost jestingly, that they needed a drudge at the convent of St. Ursula. She made inquiries. St. Ursula was a fashionable school for the daughters of wealthy Louisiana planters. She went after the job haltingly, without enthusiasm—scrubbing floors wasn't her idea of freedom. Before the week was out, however, she decided that the convent of St. Ursula might be just the place to pick up a vagrant education. She made friends with the Mother Superior, she pretended an interest in religion, she assumed simplicity, trustfulness, devoutness. She made cautious advances to the pupils, won their confidence by smuggling sweets to them. Became a go-between in the matter of love-letters to and from the outside, bought them forbidden books. But discreetly, cunningly, so that she was never detected. Even the novitiates, not quite inured to ultimate discipline, accepted her offices in the matter of covert indulgences. . . .

She stayed four years, and, at the end of that time, she suddenly concluded that her schooling had been accomplished. She could talk English like a lady when she kept her mind on it. And she had learned French. She could do sums up to the point of taking care of her money. There was nothing of further value for her to know.

And so she left.

* * *

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This time she decided not to go to the low quarter of the town for shelter. She was light enough in color, she made up her mind, to pass for a rather dark Spaniard. At will she could leave behind her plantation dialect. She had studied and aped the grand manner of ladies. She had Sinclair features and Sinclair blood in her veins. If she played her cards right nothing could stop her advance.

The more she pondered this the more her sense of superiority went to her head. In a bold moment, clad in a black silk gown that had been a cast-off of one of the novitiates at the convent, she stormed the lobby of the leading hotel. Not with any idea of living there, but merely for the purpose of testing her strength. She inquired their rates. The proprietor produced a card upon which he scribbled memoranda. When he handed it to her, she gazed at him with a patronizing smile and superciliously glanced over the written terms. "Of course," he explained, "these prices give no idea of the magnificence or gentility of our appointments. Our suites should be seen to be appreciated. Whenever your master and mistress are at liberty I should be glad to show them about the establishment." She took the blow standing and departed, bloody but unbowed. She would try the next hotel in the scale—the Bayou House. The Bayou House catered almost exclusively to males as most hotels of the fifties did. But Selina was unaware of this. A clerk was behind the walnut desk this time. He kept her waiting so long that when he did speak she was prepared for a second disillusionment. He said without any preliminaries: "Where did you work last?" She stared, then shrewdly recovered her-

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self. "At the convent of St. Ursula." The man rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "You had charge of the linen there?" Immediately her quick mind closed the gaps. They were looking for a woman to take care of their linen! She decided not to lie outright but to return an indirect answer instead. "No, the nuns do that themselves." "But you know something about it?" "Try me," she answered. . . . The next day she entered upon her duties.

* * *

Selina had no end of courage but she was not a fool. Her abortive attempts to try-out for gentility showed her which way the wind blew. In spite of her light coloring, in spite of her patrician features, in spite of her straight hair, some subtle hint of the dark taint within her crept to the surface to damn her, forever. She faced the situation calmly. It would always be so: an insurmountable difficulty that even the Sinclair blood could not overleap. Consciously she seemed unaffected by this revelation, but inwardly there had been distilled a drop of bitterness that was to curdle her content.

She found the linen of the Bayou House in a shocking condition and single handed she went after the task of rehabilitating it. She knew how to ply a deft needle and she had seen enough fine linen properly cared for at the Sinclair plantation to meet the situation competently. She hemmed and mended and darned and sprinkled the sheets with lavender. It was this last touch of imagination which soon rendered her position in the hotel impregnable. Men began to say to one

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another: "When you're in New Orleans stay at the Bayou. It's just like home!" All because Selina sprinkled lavender between the sheets.

Selina liked the life of the hotel—the contacts with men. She had a way of meeting them on their own ground, as she had met Washburn Sinclair in childhood games. She could stand up under their blows and strike back just as violently, just as maliciously. She was a handsome animal with the slender, almost gaunt, elegance of a grayhound rather than a feline. She had an uncanny way of floating down the corridors and surprising maids at their gossiping, or at their indiscretions. That they grew to fear her was soon apparent by the unsolicited bribes they offered—small intrinsically, but beyond computing as an indication of wherein lay her ultimate power. Not that Selina ever betrayed them, or even threatened to. It wasn't necessary, they offered her tribute by virtue of a sense of her superiority.

Men enjoyed a tilt of wit with Selina. But they never chucked her under the chin nor made improper proposals. There was something cool about her—a chilled strain that somehow congealed the ripe jungle blood in her veins. A perfect creature to nurse lechery because of her inherent personal immunity. The male guests of the hotel were not slow to guess this either. Soon they began to say to her in moments of amorous dullness: "Say, Selina, any likely girls in this town?" Selina believed in gauging the desire of customers. "What do you call likely?" "Well, not too tall . . . not too dark . . . not too— You know!"

That was a part of Selina's genius—she always *did*

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know. And soon another recommendation for the Bayou House began to go the masculine rounds that had nothing to do with the home-like smell of lavender between its sheets. "Just ask for Selina," became the watchword. "She'll fix you up."

Procuresses are born, not made.

* * *

Selina's fame and pocketbook grew. But she had the sense to keep herself in the safe obscurity of the linen room. And she took care never to include any of the females on the hotel staff in her lascivious programs. Any one who possesses the secrets of men's intrigues possesses power. Selina soon learned this. And also that the wages of indiscretion was extortion. Yet it was rarely necessary for her to press this truth home to her patrons. They yielded their tribute to her with the same alacrity and initiative as had marked the foolish chambermaids; only more substantially.

One day, a flashily dressed man of uncertain occupation put up at the hotel. A race-track follower, a gambler, a ten-penny soldier of fortune among other things. He may have deceived the hotel management, but he in no wise fooled Selina. "That man," said she to herself, "has nigger blood in him." He used to waylay her in the halls and talk to her, appraising her with a judicious eye. She grew discreet, cautious—feeling that he was watching her. Finally she decided to stalk him with insolence. In the midst of a sly cross-examination she suddenly flung out: "Go long, nigger! . . . Brush by!" He stared, laughed and departed.

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The next day he said: "I'm going to California. There's big money to be picked up there. Want to go long?" "How you mean—want to go long?" inquired Selina, lapsing into her plantation manner. "I mean, will you marry me? . . . You and me would make a mighty fine team." His name was Parsons.

That night she married him . . . A week later they set out for San Francisco.

* * *

San Francisco in the early sixties. Lupin-covered hills, fleas, irritating trade winds, gamblers, loose women, Unitarians, adventurers from the South, respectability, villainy, mining-camp ethics, sea-port morality. A kaleidoscope, a whirlwind, a crucible.

Selina hated it. As every one did at first. There was fierce competition, too, for gentlemen of Parsons' talents. Their capital began to dwindle. Selina took a position in a hotel—this time as a lowly chambermaid. Soon the inevitable question was being put to her: "Say, Selina, any likely girls in this town?" "What do you call likely?" "Well, not too tall . . . not too dark . . . not too— You know!"

A harder game, this. . . . Women, especially likely women, were scarce. But it could be done—if one had the talent for it, combined with a running mate who could establish questionable contacts. And the stakes were high. The whole profitable circle again, only more so. And the same sly tip going the rounds of mining camps and ships' quarters and river towns. "When you go to San Francisco, ask for Selina Parsons—she'll fix you up!" Soon it became unnecessary to use

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a hotel job as a screen. Screens in San Francisco were superfluous. Any one could tell you where to find Selina Parsons. Or more than likely you would run into her yourself, erect and scornful with a snow-white kerchief folded across her thin, sloping shoulders; an unforgettable creature about whose faintly chocolate features played the shadows cast by a broad hat of coarsely woven straw.

Prosperous years . . . the end of the Civil War . . . freed negroes drifting westward. Selina made a respectable gesture—providing servants for Rincon Hill and South Park. She became the necessity of exclusive circles. "A maid? . . . Did you say you wanted a colored maid? . . . That's easy—just look up Selina Parsons." An innocent occupation on the surface. Could it be that Selina Parsons had reformed? . . . Scarcely. But there were young ladies in the discreet drawing-rooms of South Park and Rincon Hill just as assuredly as there were young women in the dance hall districts or the lobbies of the Montgomery Street hotels. Harder game, perhaps, but infinitely worth the stalking. For the more covert the indiscretion, the greater the tribute to be levied. But not completely for gain. Years before in that certain hotel lobby in New Orleans had been distilled a drop of bitterness which had slowly spread corrosion. If Selina Parsons could not climb to high places she could pull high places down. That philosophy had its compensations.

* * *

Arrived in San Francisco one day Washburn Sin-

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clair, penniless. His father and mother dead, the Sinclair slaves freed, the plantation eaten up by mortgages. The ruin of war.

When Selina saw him her heart leaped—kinship was kinship however slack the binding tie. He was plainly out at the elbows, but he swaggered for Selina's benefit and she loved him for it. What was he doing? . . . Practicing law. . . . Where? . . . As yet he was not located. He was torn between an office in the Montgomery Block and one in Clay Street. . . . In that case, suppose they dropped over to the lobby of the Occidental Hotel where they could sit down and talk. She was just on her way to a lawyer with a case. Perhaps he would tackle it for her. She knew so little about such things. And she hadn't much faith in San Francisco lawyers. He assented without enthusiasm. At once she invented a case for his benefit, out of hand, sued a man for the recovery of stock which she had barely heard of, much less owned. Her story was so plausible, so cunningly contrived, that Washburn Sinclair rallied to her cause with the fury of a knight-at-arms succoring the oppressed. Indeed, his fervor, backed by Selina's perfect witness-stand technique, won the case. San Francisco held its sides with laughter. Overnight the legal reputation of Washburn Sinclair, the young lawyer from New Orleans, was made. In five years he became a Judge. But if he suspected Selina's chicanery in the matter of the first suit he won for her, he never betrayed his suspicion. And she loved him for that, too. A Sinclair through and through, who played a game according to the rules. A man of proper ideals, yet with enough sense of humor

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to chuckle inwardly at impudence triumphant. Who but a prig could be too scrupulous to have anything but gratitude for a coup so cunningly contrived? . . . And for his own profit, too. . . . Was it then gratitude or a sense of kinship, or both, that kept the immaculate Judge Sinclair a staunch friend of the infamous Selina Parsons to the last? . . . Who can say? It is not the fashion to publicly acknowledge sisters touched with the tar brush. Selina knew this and she forgave him his reticence on the subject. But she glowed secretly with his achievements. Doubly so, for her part in them. The stone which the builders rejected had indeed become the corner-stone. Selina's satisfaction was at once tribal and ironic. The primitive and the sophisticated impulse in juxtaposition.

* * *

But if Washburn Sinclair's first legal triumph in San Francisco won him his ultimate position it also added another vocation to Selina's list. She became a professional witness—a witness not to be shaken even by the shrewdness of Judge Sinclair himself. And, try to shake her he always did, in spite of the bond between them. It was a spectacle that all San Francisco flocked to see—Judge Sinclair on the bench and Selina Parsons on the witness stand. A battle with Selina always triumphant. No matter how stiff the blows he rained at her she stood up to them without flinching; as she had stood up to them in childhood in their games together. Ah, if the public could have but known the currents flowing beneath the surface of these tilts at arms! The mixed affections and rancours, the mixed

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satisfactions and exasperations, the mixed prides and humilities.

After many such an encounter, in the privacy of Judge Sinclair's chambers, he would say, not at all reprovingly:

"Selina, you were lying this afternoon."

"Why didn't you prove it, then?" she would flash back.

It was useless to attempt even a mild reformation. She was so engagingly wicked that one ended by accepting her delinquencies as the very gauge of her curious charm. One either admired or feared her—sometimes both. But there were those who loved her also, and Washburn Sinclair was one of them. And when it came time for him to be laid low with a mortal illness she was never denied an entrance to the sick room. Selina came and went with all the humble arrogance of the privileged—the first time in all her career that she had ever set foot across the threshold of the Sinclair mansion.

Judge Sinclair was not a man to yield up the ghost without a struggle. He wrestled mightily through tedious months. Selina's visits became daily.

"You're the only person who cheers him up!" his grandchild, Elizabeth Sinclair, told her.

Which was nothing more than the truth. It was a bad day, indeed, when Selina did not close the door upon his feeble chuckles.

Meanwhile, Selina's husband died, quite unexpectedly, of blood-poisoning. Selina made a gesture of respectability and buried him with the utmost gentility.

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In spite of their shady compact he was her one concession to the conventions.

"I've never *lived* with a man, anyway!" she used to boast with illogical morality.

She was out of town the day Judge Sinclair died, marrying off one of her "girls" to an old rancher with a flair for experience in his women. Hearing the news she flew back to San Francisco. She went to a florist but nothing that he had pleased her. But later in the afternoon passing an old Rincon Hill garden she saw a magnolia tree in full bloom. Its fragrance brought back the complete picture of old plantation days; in a mist the cabin of her childhood, the white house of Marse Sinclair with its wide veranda and its Greek pillars, rose before her. She crushed her lip with her sharp even teeth to keep back the tears. Then she walked boldly into the garden and plucked an opening magnolia bud.

An hour later she arrived at the Sinclair mansion with this simple tribute in her hand. The maid let her sit in the hall while she went upstairs to announce her. She came back promptly. If Selina would go up to Miss Elizabeth's room . . . Selina complied—but too swiftly. A discussion was taking place on the other side of the door—a discussion which involved Selina. Selina listened. It appeared that Elizabeth had made provision for Selina to go to the funeral.

"What—that filthy old nigger!" she heard a strange voice protesting.

The rest was lost in the blur of Selina's resentful rage. But she had the wit to stand motionless until

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the discussion had fallen to the whispered level of discretion. Then she tapped softly.

It was Justine Wentworth who threw open the door to admit her. Selina drew herself up. "Is the mistress here?" she asked with devastating dignity.

Justine's lips curled. "There's a *colored* person here, asking for the mistress," she said with a voice of high, clear insolence. "I suppose she means you, Bess."

Elizabeth Sinclair came to the door. Selina stepped back. "I came to see Judge Sinclair—for the last time."

Without answering, Elizabeth stepped outside. Selina followed her down the corridor. Before the Judge's library Elizabeth stopped.

"He's in there—with the books he loved," she said.

Selina nodded and went in alone. When the door closed upon her she fell against it, trembling. She felt the magnolia blossom slip to the floor. She bent over, feeling in the dimness, to recover it. Suddenly her hands came in contact with the chill of its white petals. She picked it up.

Her eyes, accustomed by this time to the gloom, made out the figure of old Judge Sinclair bathed in a soft light, coffinless, reclining upon the leather couch that had so often rested him. She stole forward and dropped the magnolia on his breast. She looked down. A sudden, terrible chill shook her: the snow-white bud was swiftly turning black. . . . Then she remembered: she had touched it with her hands!

* * *

The symbol of the soiled magnolia bloom pursued

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her for days, for weeks, for months after. It was useless for her to argue that contact with any one's fingers would have turned the petals black. The fact remained, not that *any* spotless bloom had become tainted, but the one spotless bloom she had picked for a last tribute to Washburn Sinclair had felt her smirching touch. She fell to brooding over it with a sort of savage despair quite new to her. There were days when her whole will seemed paralyzed by the contemplation of this morbid incident. She began to fall into semi-stupors which carried her to the outskirts of vast jungles. She saw visions clearly at these times—visions of great, green forests that had no open spaces through which the sun could filter, of curious birds scarlet and blue and silver that flew from limb to limb, of animals swinging from great trees by their tails, of idols that raised hideous faces in the moonlight and devoured children. Slave-ship and human market-place floated before her eyes—waking nightmares from which she often emerged lying prone upon the floor with a white foam upon her lips. And, as if this disintegration of her conscious ego were not enough, her moments of cool sanity began to be shadowed with defeats. The times became out of joint with professional witnesses; men from mining camps and ships' quarters and river towns no longer needed her offices in their amorous questings; the drawing-rooms of Rincon Hill and South Park had long ago been deserted for the ballrooms of Presidio Heights and with them had gone the need for Selina Parsons in the respectable rôle of purveyor of discreet colored maids. Maids of the French variety had come in—needing only the stamp

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of their nationality to insure discretion. In short, Selina Parsons became overnight of another generation. Even her business acumen deserted her. Day after day, she saw her fortune dwindle under the steady drip of bad plays upon the stock market. She became like a forced, flamboyant vine whose grasping tendrils had been suddenly bereft of the lattice work over which it climbed toward the sun. As indeed she was. Deep down she came of a race whose immaturity demanded a prop. The Sinclair legend had supplied her with support. But the fountain-head of this subconscious strength was gone. And so she starved as pearls are said to do when they too seldom rest upon the bosom of their owner. Some natures need the stimulus of direct contacts with their ideal. For, in spite of all the ironies and humiliation, the Sinclair blood was the secret pride of Selina Parsons. And prides and ideals are curiously one. . . . An orchid parasite upon a sturdy host? Selina Parsons was at once something less and something more than that. A clouded pearl encircling a throat of alabaster—that comes nearer the mark. A clouded pearl gathering new life and energy from warm white flesh. And with the warm white flesh denied, slowly crumbling to lusterless disintegration.

* * *

The day that Elizabeth Sinclair came to see her—would she ever forget that day—that moment? Elizabeth Sinclair with all the strengths and some of the weaknesses of the Sinclair blood showing through the gallant wistfulness of her smile.

"I have not seen you since grandfather died." Thus

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tritely did she pave the way to significant revelations.

Selina, accustomed to the indirections of delinquency, peered at her shrewdly. A slight puffiness at the eyes . . . the perfectly chiseled features blurred a trifle under the cloud of some subtle physical strain. Elizabeth, suddenly sensing an inquisitory glance, returned a challenging look. At once Selina knew—at once she read the complete truth in the forced insolence of Elizabeth Sinclair's updrawn eyebrows.

"Ah, you are expecting a baby!"

"Thanks. . . . How kind you are! . . . Most women would have waited and let me—"

"Most women are fools!"

"Or cruel, perhaps. . . . There are complications, naturally."

"You mean that the father—"

"Knows nothing about it."

"What do you want me to do? . . . Make him marry you?"

Elizabeth Sinclair released a note of exquisite laughter. "Selina! . . . You old dear, you! . . . Do you really think you could?"

"It wouldn't be the first time."

"Fancy! . . . I almost wish—I almost wish I felt differently. It would be such fun . . . such delicious fun to watch you in action. Dragging my man back by the hair of the head! . . . Yes, that would be how you would accomplish it. . . . He has such quantities of hair. Whole handfuls of it!" Again the laughter. . . . Selina suffered it grimly. The released tension of weeks. You didn't have to tell Selina. "But even if I wanted him back . . . Well, it wouldn't be so easy

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—not even with you at the helm. . . . You see, he's vanished utterly. . . . Gone, completely gone! He had a sixth sense, I guess. Or maybe he just got tired. . . . Not a flattering conclusion but probably true. Still, he needn't have been so panicky. I'm not handy with a shotgun and thank God there are no males about bent on avenging my honor."

"Damn him!" said Selina under her breath.

"Not in the least," objected Elizabeth. "We might just as well be sensible. It isn't fair to damn anybody. I was bored and he amused me. I'm no school girl fresh from convent. I knew just what I was doing. And I don't regret any of it. . . . If he had insisted, I suppose I'd have let him marry me. But it would have been humiliating. It always is, under such circumstances. Besides, most husbands aren't worth it."

Selina knitted her brows. "And what is the name of the man you're really in love with?"

"In love with!"

"Exactly. . . . Women don't make fools of themselves without a reason. . . . I've dealt with women for over fifty years . . . dealt with them as if they were so much merchandise. . . . That shocks you, eh? . . . Well, why not? . . . Folks have their price like everything else. But that's neither have nor there. The point is that women don't go wrong for food or clothes or even cussedness. In nine cases out of ten they go wrong from disappointment. As you did. . . . You don't have to tell me."

A flash came from Elizabeth Sinclair's eyes. "I didn't expect you to use that phrase. . . . I don't consider that becoming a mother means going wrong."

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The shrewd old eyes returned fire for fire. "Neither do I. That's what sets a woman right, again."

The anger between them died. "Will you help me?"

"Don't ask silly questions."

"Thanks. . . . I want you to go with me to Laguna Vista. And stay until it's all over."

"You mean, you want me to take charge . . . to arrange for everything?"

"Just that."

"When do we start?"

"Next week."

"That suits me."

"They told me that you were a bad woman."

"Is that why you came to me?"

"Yes."

"They're right, I am."

"Thank God for that, then."

"Better keep your gratitude for the devil."

"Not at all. . . . It is God who will be pleased."

* * *

Within a fortnight they were established at Laguna Vista. A gilded summer it was for Selina with every situation she adored rolled into one. Intrigue, expectation, domesticity. Yes, Selina had her domestic side. Had she not been married thirty odd years? Then, the breadth of existence at Laguna Vista revived flavors of her plantation days. "This place needs a hundred niggers!" she used to exclaim. What she meant was a hundred slaves. Selina's leanings were toward the patriarchal. But above everything else, there was the reëstablishment of contact with the fountain-head of

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all her energies. . . . To be the mainspring, the secret force behind Sinclair endeavor—this left a sweet taste. And mingled with this sweet taste was the bitter tang of Sinclair frailty. Not an altogether unpleasant flavor to the palate of the ineligible. Mixed breeds—mixed satisfactions.

In all the weeks, the months with Elizabeth, Selina never asked a single question. They would sit for hours silent . . . sometimes for days. Then, a dribble of confession would run from Elizabeth's lips—or a torrent, if the mood were on. . . . She learned everything but the man's name. But she had infinite patience. She knew in the end it would have to come.

"The only man who wasn't afraid of my money!" Elizabeth would exclaim bitterly.

Had she loved this man . . . or admired him . . . or feared him? That depended upon what one meant by any of these terms. That she had been fascinated was plain. *And who was the man that you really loved?* Selina did not again repeat that question. It wasn't necessary. Dustin Huntley. The contempt that crept into Elizabeth's tone when she mentioned that name was cruel with revelation.

But the one quality in Elizabeth that made Selina glow inwardly with kinship was her total lack of repentance. When Elizabeth cried out: "I'm not sorry! . . . I don't care!" her voice glowed with defiant triumph. . . . As her time drew near, perhaps her insistence became a shade mellowed but in no whit less emphatic. But it was natural that her personal reaction to her condition grew more and more compromised by the claims of something beyond her.

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"Yes," she would repeat, again and again, "if he had insisted I suppose I'd have let him marry me." In a tone that left no doubt in Selina's mind as to the mental process going on beneath. After all, the child-to-be had rights. One day Elizabeth went a step farther. "If he were here, now, I would marry him—humiliation or no humiliation."

Selina looked up from her sewing. "I could still bring it about," she said with conviction.

"No, you could not," replied Elizabeth, "for the simple reason that an ocean lies between us. . . . You see, he was a discreet and competent lover." And she laughed bitterly.

Meanwhile the child was born. "A girl!" echoed Elizabeth, sighing as she said it.

The doctor, an old knave pressed into service by Selina, at the end of a week, said:

"I don't think she'll make the grade."

That night Elizabeth said: "I'm dying, I know. . . ."

Selina agreed with her as tenderly as she could. "You ought to make a will."

"And advertise my nameless child to the world? . . . Listen, Selina . . . I leave her to your care. Bring her up simply. When she's eighteen let her make her choice. If she likes money at the risk of scandal help her to fight for it. . . . Somehow, I don't think she will."

The next morning she asked the doctor pointblank, "How long will I last?"

"Less than a week."

"Ah, then I can die at home! In perfectly good form—with no questions asked."

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That very afternoon they started for San Francisco in the only carriage that Lakeview boasted. A weary journey that consumed two days. How Elizabeth lived through it Selina could never determine. Once they arrived in the city, Selina said good-by and departed with the baby in her arms.

Elizabeth was tearless through this last ordeal. She pressed Selina's brown hand to her heart and drew the old serving woman to her.

"Kajetan . . . his name was Kajetan."

These were the last words that Selina heard her utter.

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Chapter Nine

NOTHING could have been more lovely than the gardens at Laguna Vista on that midsummer day in August when the gay Forsythe house party bore down on them. There had been thick heat for a week and the surrounding country had been burned from gold to a drab straw color. The buckeye trees were already yielding up their leaves, standing like gaunt and ill-favored spinsters among the garlanded oaks. The sky was a faint blue; the air, along the highways, dust laden. To come in such weather and out of such conditions into luscious greenness was like turning the year back to spring.

Karl had come up a week in advance of the others and every water-tap and sprinkler had dripped moisture. The result was a riot of bloom such as Laguna Vista had never seen. The oleander bushes were bent with blossoms and the orange trees fainting in their own perfume. Green lawns, deep shadows, gay umbrellas, wide-striped awnings, in a magic fairy ring. Spring without question. And within a stone's throw mid-summer weighing down the orchard with its golden yield—tawny apricots, purple plums, nectarines, black figs, yellow peaches.

At the prospect of a glittering company, Mammy was radiant and ironical in turn. All the Forsythe servants were to be installed for a fortnight under the supervision of Mammy. She had seen to that. She wanted to be on the firing line within full view of the

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maneuvers. And more than this she liked authority; to wield the scepter or the lash as occasion offered. And beyond any general satisfaction in gestures of pomp and circumstance was the very specific satisfaction of assembling all the unwitting actors of a somnolent melodrama upon a single stage. Justine, Adrienne, Kajetan! A hundred times a day she repeated these three names with all the maliciousness of a witch mumbling a profane charm. But it was upon the name Justine that she vented all her bitterness and spleen—the other two were mere accessories to a fact ripe for disaster. For, as she mumbled, she could behold the entire enchanted present in which Justine Forsythe moved and had her opulent being dissolved into the grim penury of endless bleak to-morrows.

* * *

Justine Forsythe was carried away with the beauties of Laguna Vista. "And, to think," she said, "that I have never been up here!"

She jumped out of the motor-boat and ran up the freshly graveled walks, thrusting her face into every scented thing.

"Karl planned every detail with you in mind, Mrs. Forsythe," Adrienne explained. "Lawns, gay awnings, quantities of perfume. . . . He made over the place."

"What was it like before?"

It was Kajetan who spoke up. "Gaunt and tawny . . . a large-limbed goddess withered by Homeric famines."

"Oh, you have been here before!" There was discreet surprise in the exclamation.

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"Would that be necessary? . . . One can see for miles around what it must have been before the transformation."

Justine snapped a spray of leaves from a lemon tree and crushed it between her palms, sniffing its pungence. Kajetan's reply was hardly as satisfactory as one might wish. How indirect these foreigners were! And crafty.

"It was always lovely!" cried Adrienne, in protest. "Not green like this and full of blossoms. . . . But nice and sunburnt and healthy. I like the brown hills."

Kajetan wrinkled his nose. "An incorrigible Californian!" he cried mockingly.

"Besides, you talk as if California was always like this. . . . You should see it in February. Every shade of green in the calendar."

"And roses, I suppose, ten feet deep."

"Not in February, Kajetan. . . . We have some sense. We begin with cool things like buttercups and cowslips. Then come the acacias . . . narcissus and flag lilies where it is windy. And lupins and poppies. . . . Finally roses . . . by April." Adrienne threw back her head and laughed in triumph.

"Ah, but we live in the present, my dear young lady. And, at present, California, I repeat, is gaunt and tawny. An emaciated goddess waiting for her funeral pyre."

"She always waits for that," spoke up Karl. "Waits in dread with the coming of every midsummer. . . . The year I planted this garden the dread did not leave her until December. Do you remember, Fräulein, that year? . . . the fires that threatened us?"

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It was Kajetan's turn to laugh. "It would seem you pay dearly for your green grass and flag lilies where the wind blows . . . and your roses."

"That was an exceptional year. . . . Usually by October the anxiety is over."

"Let me see!" Kajetan was jeering. "It is August. We have two full months in which to be cast into an oven and consumed."

"Don't!" cried Adrienne, and she stamped her foot. "You mustn't joke about such things!"

By this time they had reached the Big House. Mammy was standing at the head of the steps in the center of a green frame of grapevines starred with jasmine. Adrienne caught her breath. Mammy had never looked so handsome, so dignified. She was in black, as always. But this time she had on a new dress of shining alpaca gathered very fully about the waist and billowing out in thick folds. A pure linen kerchief was folded about her shoulders. And beneath the shadow of her great hat glinted golden earrings, hoop-shaped, and more massive than any Adrienne had ever seen her wear.

Justine Forsythe went up first. "You have a beautiful place here, Selina," she said.

Selina bowed. "It has been at your service for years, Mrs. Forsythe."

Kajetan was standing close to Karl. "What an extraordinary figure! . . . She's like a dark Lady Macbeth waiting to welcome the king of Scotland to her husband's castle."

"And his doom," Karl finished in an undertone.

"Precisely. . . . Who is she?"

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Adrienne spoke up. "My foster mother."

"Ah!" said Kajetan. "How interesting!"

And with that they all moved into the circle of Mammy's greeting.

* * *

The advance guard had been Justine Forsythe, Kajetan and Adrienne. On Friday came Bud Forsythe and Bess and a score of others—Conchita Emory, the Clifford Woods, Forrest Deering, alone (Mrs. Deering had gone to New York), Jane Witherspoon and a number of faces and names new to Adrienne. Jed Forsythe ran up over Saturday with Dustin Huntley.

Adrienne was in a seventh heaven of delight. It was her dream of childhood come true—all the people that had been pressed into gilt frames disenchanted and taking up their gay existence just where it had left off. Mammy, too, was radiant, but there was something covert about her satisfaction which was disturbing. Even Dustin Huntley seemed to have recovered a measure of his old-time humor. On the very first day of his arrival Adrienne had dragged him up on the veranda with the rest of the company sprawled out on the lawn, and put him through the paces of "Pretty Isabella."

> "Pretty Isabella, with a foot like Cinderella,
> And a sunshade built for two!"

"My first singing teacher!" she announced with special gravity, as the guests applauded.

Huntley was embarrassed but pleased.

"Sing 'Tassels on My Boots'!" cried Karl.

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Adrienne complied. Kajetan was captivated. Only Bud Forsythe protested.

"What's the big idea? . . . Can't we have something that isn't a million years old? Those two songs were both chestnuts when I was in the cradle."

"Oh, didn't you know," called out Bess in a high, clear tone of perfect insolence, "that it's quite the thing to be quaint?"

"Shut up!" muttered her brother, under his breath. "You make me sick." He bounded across the lawn and up the steps to Adrienne's side. "What do you say to a hike? . . . These females will drive me crazy."

They cut through a moist meadow and came suddenly to a trail that wound unevenly through manzanita and stunted laurel. The ground was hot to their tread. Adrienne led the way, gliding over the burnt stubble like some woodsy creature in swift flight. Bud followed, red and panting. Half-way up the hillside, he called a truce.

"What's the big idea? . . . Any one would think we were catching a train."

Adrienne turned and burst out laughing. His face was flushed and in burning competition with his hair. "You poor old thing you!" she cried. "Let's rest awhile—here."

She threw herself down on a thick mold of oak-leaves. Bud defiantly followed suit.

"Whew!" he cried. "This country is as near hell as I ever want to get."

"It's only eighty-eight," returned Adrienne blandly. "I looked at the thermometer on the porch before we started out."

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"*Only* eighty-eight. What are you, anyway, a salamander?"

"A which?" Adrienne blew a tuft of thistledown in his direction.

"A salamander . . . a thing that lives in furnaces."

"There isn't any such animal," objected Adrienne, competently. "I mean, it doesn't live in furnaces."

"Where does it live, then?"

"In dictionaries."

Bud was in too sullen a mood to be amused. "You're too wise for your age!" he blurted out. "That's what comes of always having a lot of old men hanging over you."

"*Old* men?" Adrienne was frankly puzzled.

"Yes, you heard me the first time. . . . Huntley and Karl and now this Kajetan person. . . . It's disgusting! . . . The whole three of them are in love with you. Anybody can see that."

"Of course they are," she threw back gayly. "And I'm in love with every one of them. . . . But they're not old."

"Karl's the youngest of the lot, and he'll never see thirty again. . . . And as for Dustin Huntley—well, he used to be cracked on my aunt Elizabeth. So that places him."

Adrienne took in a sharp little breath. "Ah, was he? Your aunt Elizabeth . . . I never knew that."

"And Kajetan, too. . . . At least so Bess says. Mother spilled a lot of sentimental chatter to her one day. . . . Well, it's a good thing for us that Aunt Bess couldn't see either one of them. The Forsythe family would have been out of luck, then. Can you see

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Huntley with the Sinclair fortune? . . . or Kajetan? . . . I wonder what I'd have been doing if somebody else had grabbed off the dorine. Clerking in an insurance office, most likely."

"Would it have mattered so terribly?"

"*Would it have mattered!* . . . I'll say it would. Don't kid yourself. It's money that talks in these United States . . . You'll find that out before you're many years older."

"Oh, well, who knows? . . . After all you *have* got a father. He'd have done something!"

"Dad! . . . Say, the only way dad ever won a fortune was to be married to it. A good scout and all that —but *you* know."

"Do I? Anyway he's a nice man and I like him."

"Oh, everybody likes dad . . . But he's just the sort that has to have money and can't make it himself. You can't fancy him married to a poor woman, can you?"

"But he was married to a poor woman once. . . . I mean your mother wasn't rich at the beginning."

"That was just a fluke that turned out right. . . . Or maybe the old man had a hunch." He paused, chuckling, enormously diverted by the idea. "Yes, that must have been it—a hunch, he wouldn't have been such a damn fool otherwise."

"You mean to say that in his right mind your father would never have married a poor girl?"

"Decidedly."

"Then this discussion isn't leading anywhere."

"Isn't it? . . . I've lost track of it."

"It's about what would have happened if they had

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both married somebody else. Well, you wouldn't have been, that's all."

"Damned if you're not right."

"Or—or you might," speculated Adrienne, "have been half of somebody else."

"Half of somebody— Say, how do you get that way? That isn't possible."

"How do you know it isn't?"

"Because . . . because . . . Well, because I know. And, besides, it isn't a decent subject."

"I didn't start it!" returned Adrienne belligerently.

Bud conceded a savage grin. "But you finished it. . . . Where were we before—"

"On the subject of your father."

"Oh, yes. But you mustn't think he's a rotter just because—because—"

"Because he married money? . . . Don't be silly. I told you before: I like him, anyway."

"God, what condescension! . . . That isn't fair. He hates his position—down deep. Any man would. But it's just one of the concessions a person has to make to get on in the world. . . . I know a man who has craved all his life to be an actor. He took over his father's business instead. Afraid to get too far away from the feed bag. That's back of any compromise in life. If dad only had the capacity to double the Sinclair fortune he could feel himself justified. . . ." Bud drew himself up importantly. "If he keeps his eye on me, he'll do just that thing."

Adrienne's tone was nicely balanced between derision and gravity. "I don't doubt it for a moment!" she exclaimed.

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"What's the big idea? . . . Don't you think I can show the old man a thing or two? . . . Listen, I didn't go to Harvard simply to learn how to conjugate Latin verbs. I went to establish contacts! And did I establish any? . . . Well, I haven't roomed with Carter Fosdick two years for nothing."

He paused to let the significance of his statement sink in. Adrienne shrugged. "Well, what of that?" she demanded.

"Ye gods and writhing cuttle fishes! . . . Hear her! What of rooming two years with Carter B. Fosdick, Esquire? . . . Well, just this, my young lady. He's the tender male offspring of Simon S. Fosdick and he's slated to inherit the second largest fortune in the United States when the old gent shoves off. . . . Now, if I'd had a chance to room with the *first* fortune in the land, believe me I'd have done it. But as it turned out—the supreme fortune was post-graduating at Yale. That would have meant changing my college and there are some things that a man of taste does not do."

"Oh, I see," meekly replied Adrienne. "And has Simon S. Fosdick's tender male offspring and so forth, a sister?"

"Of course not."

"Then I don't quite see . . . I mean you can't marry *him*."

"Don't try to be funny!" objected Bud, kicking the ground furiously. "Don't you see? A family like that has schemes, tips, projects. If you play the game right you horn in on them . . . you're bound to. . . . Just now with the war on in Europe there's a thousand op-

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portunities a day for a man of money. It just means signing up with the right crowd. . . . Well, I'm going to put dad in the way of a rising stock market. I've invited Carter to run out here for a visit. He arrives next week. And his dad's coming too. There's some sort of a deal going to be pulled off on the Coast. That's really why I asked Carter. I knew Simon S. was headed this way. It's a great chance to have the governor meet him. And if the right cards are played—"

He broke off significantly and Adrienne found herself exclaiming: "You *are* a gambler, aren't you? Just like your great-grandfather Howard."

Bud preened himself in the dubious warmth of her estimate. "Don't you like gamblers?"

She clasped her hands rapturously. "Like them? . . . I adore them!"

"You get my idea, don't you—I mean the *complete* idea? Dad meets Simon S.—they eat and drink and are merry together . . . quarts of Scotch-and-soda and all that sort of thing. Naturally Simon S. is entranced with the pater—everybody always is. That's the quality that made it possible for him to marry money. . . . Well, they get confidential in their cups—*you* know! No, of course you don't, but no matter. The next thing, old Simon has tipped dad off to a sure war-time play. And blooey-blooey the Sinclair fortune is doubled. Not only that, but dad's popularity shoots way up. 'Devilish clever chap, that Forsythe! . . . Always knew he had it in him!' That's what all his friends will say. And mater will be tickled too, no end. Women like to have their men justified

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and don't you forget it." He screwed a silver dollar against his nose in lieu of an eyeglass. "Ripping scheme—wot?"

Adrienne remained silent. For some reason, she didn't relish seeing Jed Forsythe stripped to his last inadequacy, especially by his son.

"Well?" he demanded, finally.

She rose slowly. "I think we ought to be getting back," she said.

The quick flush that she was beginning to know so well mounted to his forehead. "Getting back! . . . What's the big idea? Why, we've just come."

"I know. But they may think it strange. Bess will be sure to say something disagreeable. And your mother—" She shrugged.

"You're just pretending!" he blurted out hotly. "You know perfectly well you don't give a damn what Bess says. As a matter of fact you enjoy going to the mat with her. I know—I've watched you in action. And as for my mother—"

He broke off at the same point she had. She turned to him triumphantly. "You see—that's just it!"

He jumped to his feet. "How do you know so much?" he cried. "You're just a child. You've never seen the world. And, yet, I can't get past you—not a single step."

"Do you want to?"

"I don't know whether I do or not! . . . But I can't help wondering. How—how did you get the way you are?"

She took off her hat for a moment and shook out her long, sun-flecked hair. "I was born that way, I guess.

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And then I've had books . . . and Karl . . . and the movies."

"Movies!" he echoed.

"Absolutely . . . every week at Lakeview." She laughed gayly. "Educational films . . . I know all about the perils of a great city."

"We happen to be on a hillside!" he said significantly.

His glance brought the color to her cheeks. But she didn't feel in the least angry. She simply answered calmly. "Alone on a hillside—that's why we're going back."

She started forward. He detained her with a tight grip upon her arm. "I'll bet you've come up here a hundred times with Karl!"

His voice was shaded with menace. She felt her heart pounding, but she replied coolly, borrowing his phrase: "Oh, Karl, he's only an old egg!"

He released her with a gesture half impatience, half scorn. "I believe you like 'em old," he cried. "Even Forrest Deering. It's disgusting the way he ogles you."

Her resentment broke before the sharp poignance of his tone. "Why, Bud Forsythe!" she exclaimed. "You told me the first day I met you that you never had been jealous."

He looked at her steadily. "That was two weeks ago!" he answered. "Don't you see, can't you see," he went on passionately, "that I've had two weeks of hell. I'm crazy about you—now, you know, *crazy about you!*"

She put her hat on her head again. "It's time we started back."

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"Not—not by a damn sight! . . . We shan't start back until we've come to some sort of an understanding."

"Understanding? . . . I'm afraid that's impossible. Why, you don't even know who I am." She laughed a little tartly. "I don't even know that, myself."

She swept past him resolutely. He caught her in both his arms and held her tight. She stood inert. He bent down and kissed her. . . . Slowly she disentangled herself.

"May I go back, now?" she asked coolly.

* * *

Her uncanny poise lasted until she came in sight of the lawn again. She had kept just a little ahead of Bud on the entire homeward stretch but suddenly she felt his breath blowing against her ear as he said:

"If Bess says anything nasty I'll settle her."

She stopped short. There was a new note in his voice—a possessive note of triumphant privilege which moved her to make a last feeble stand. "Oh, don't worry! . . . I can take care of myself, thank you."

But the very fact that Bud accepted this remark without challenge told her how obvious and hollow her gesture of self-sufficiency was. *She didn't want to take care of herself!* This realization left her trembling. But she kept up a show of bravado until they came close enough to the big house to see the figures of the guests weaving in and out of the shadows. Then, she turned sharply aside and fled to the cottage. Mammy was just coming down the path. Adrienne burst into tears.

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"Why—honey-child!"

Adrienne stamped her foot. "It's nothing! Nothing at all! I'm just tired. I'm going in to lie down."

Mammy's eyes became pin-pricks of interrogation. "Tired, eh! Humph!" That was all she said.

Adrienne flung herself into the house. Her tears had ceased. She wanted to laugh, to sing, to shiver with delight. God! wasn't life beautiful! . . . And those moments on the hillside how quickly and without warning they had begun suddenly to whirl and send off dazzling fragments of color. Like a pin-wheel whirring dully up to a point and then breaking into a thousand colors. And, yet, how coolly she had taken the whole performance. She almost hated herself for that. She didn't like being so self-contained and skillful over anything that mattered so much.

* * *

At the dinner table that night Adrienne sat between Karl and Dustin Huntley. Bud was at a far end of the table shut off from view by a huge candelabra. For the most part she was silent. She seemed to have lost her power of contact with both the older men. She had long since been conscious of this barrier between herself and Huntley—but Karl—if anything, Karl suddenly had grown even more remote. Remote and faded. It was incredible. The night he had bade her good-by at the Exposition had been farewell, indeed. It might have been his shadow sitting next her, and the only emotion she could register was a trifling touch of melancholy such as one feels before a door which has closed never to open again. She began to wonder when

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he would be gone, not regretfully, but a little impatiently. Ghosts were not to her taste. And, underneath this strange, unbidden indifference ran a fear of the forces which could so completely open and close the paths to affection. The beautiful Christmas feast, the long hours at the piano, the walks, the visions he had brought her, the friendship he had given her, the contacts he had made for her—at this moment they meant nothing. And the rest of the company, save one, less than nothing. And Mammy, in severe dignity over the serving table, was as remote as any—Mammy who had been with her since the first!

And she had been won from them all by some one who had built up no patient tower of affection, who was at no pains to be tender, who could hurt and wound and mock her, if the mood were on! There had been something almost brutal in that scene upon the hillside. Instead of caresses there had been blows. Bud had struck at her from the depths of a strange, new torment. And she had stood up to the punishment and struck back with fine indifference. A primitive performance that missed club wielding and stone throwing by only a few thousand years. Were the processes of life always as brutal as this?

"Ah, you are thoughtful, Fräulein!"

Karl's observation was in reality a question. A gentle interrogation which she found herself hating—hating the manner of it, the delicacy of it. Bud would have said: "What's the big idea?" With an air of assurance.

She reflected a moment before she answered. "I am always thoughtful."

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Her voice was cool with rebuke. Karl looked at her intently. "Ah, of course. . . . Just so! . . . Pray forgive me!"

A spasm of fear caught her. Karl—she was losing Karl! But she was either unwilling or incapable of making a move to recapture him. It was like standing with a lifeline in hand inertly watching a form sweep downstream. She did not answer him this time but she thought to herself: "Why must I behave so badly? . . . In a few days he will be gone." And presently moved by a sense of decency, of duty, she said to him:

"I want you to play some Chopin for me, after dinner."

"Chopin? . . . Me! . . . With the great Kajetan here! . . . Ah, Fräulein, you are as polite as ever . . . but that is all. . . . The fact is you would be bored to death."

"Karl, dear, how can you!"

"Fräulein, I understand . . . people outgrow things —dolls and pig-tails and friends. Outgrow them, over night. One cannot explain it but one can accept it. . . . It is just one of the things that happen."

His understanding was uncanny. She hated him for it—it made her seem so immature, so childish. There was no conceivable reply she could make to him, no reply to which she could give the stamp of sincerity.

"It's turned suddenly cold," Justine Forsythe was saying. "So we shan't have our coffee on the porch to-night. We'll go into the big room."

Without Adrienne realizing it, dinner was over. She felt enormously relieved.

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The big room with all the family portraits simpering and scowling and smiling down on them.

"A chamber of horrors!" Jed Forsythe said, laughingly, as he arranged the inevitable liqueur glasses.

"That's only because they're *my* relations!" shot back Justine good naturedly, seating herself at the coffee urn. Mammy stood behind her, as much a part as a picture as any in the room. She was so much more than a servant.

"In any case," broke in Kajetan, "they would be difficult to live with."

"Not at all!" protested Adrienne, in that cool, competent way of hers. "I've lived with them all my life. I adore them!"

Kajetan took a liqueur from Jed. "All your life, Miss Adrienne? . . . You were not born here, surely!"

Mammy moved swiftly forward with a tray of black coffee. "Yes . . . at Laguna Vista. . . . Seventeen years ago—lacking a week." Mammy's poise was indescribable and her voice cool to the point of insolence as she said this, offering her tray to Dustin Huntley.

Justine Forsythe gave a slight start, which she converted instantly into a movement toward the coffee-urn. "In this very house, wasn't it, Selina?"

Selina's eyes flashed surprise, then smothered admiration. "Yes, Mrs. Forsythe, in this very house."

Not a move of this unheralded duel escaped Adrienne. She could feel the color leave her face. But she knew that every eye was trained on her and rallying her forces she said clearly:

"The fig grove at the back of the house and these pictures were my first memories. It was a long time be-

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fore I could make up my mind what pictures were. Finally—do you know what I finally decided? . . . That they were enchanted people."

"How quaint!" cried Conchita Emory.

"And I thought one day they would all step down from their frames and go on living just where they had left off."

"What a terrible possibility!" exclaimed Justine.

"Upsetting, to say the least," put in Jed.

"Rather," said Bud. "They'd probably take complete possession and show us the door."

"I shouldn't go," announced Bess coolly.

"Oh, shouldn't you? . . . How do you get that way?"

Her answer was a look of sullen anger.

Adrienne thought: "They're all thinking about the Sinclair fortune. . . . They're terrified to lose it. They're still uncertain after all these years."

Justine called Mammy and again filled her tray with cups of coffee. "Adrienne, why didn't you tell us you had a birthday next week? . . . We'll have to plan a party. . . . What would you like? . . . A dinner? . . . A dance? . . . Fancy costumes? . . . What?"

Adrienne clasped her hands. "Fancy costumes! . . . Could I?"

"How can we do a fancy costume stunt up here?" sneered Bess. "There isn't a dressmaker within fifty miles."

"Well," returned her mother calmly, "I didn't think we were all *that* helpless! . . . Surely we can hold a needle and thread. That—with a little imagination—should make anything possible. . . . Besides, we have

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Selina. The clothes she makes for Adrienne are charming."

"Are the men in this?" demanded Bud ungraciously.

Adrienne flushed. "Perhaps, Mrs. Forsythe, fancy dress isn't so good after all. . . . Nobody seems enthusiastic."

"Nonsense!" said Jed. "Whatever *you* want, Adrienne, is the thing."

Adrienne gasped. This was the first time that Jed Forsythe had ever especially remarked her presence. She did like him even if he couldn't fall in love with poverty.

"It's to be fancy dress, then," announced Justine. "Any particular line? . . . Colonial? . . . Oriental? . . . Spanish? . . . We'll have to decide. There's only a week, you know."

Kajetan's glance swept the portraits. "Why don't you have a party of disenchantment?"

Justine let out a rippling laugh. "A party of dis—"

"Exactly, madame." Kajetan's tone was a little miffed, a little severe, as it always was at a hint of ridicule. "Disenchant these ancestors. Make them step out of their frames."

"Why, Kajetan, how perfectly stunning!"

"I don't think I quite understand," hesitated Adrienne.

"He means, my dear, to have us impersonate the people in the frames. . . . It's tremendously clever! . . . What do you say? . . . Karl, will you help us design costumes?"

"Anything you wish."

"We'll do all the sewing ourselves. . . . This is go-

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ing to be an original party in more ways than one."

"Too damned original!" said Bess under her breath.

"And I'll send down for a make-up man from Goldsteins. We'll make *that* concession to professionalism."

"But does Adrienne want this er—er—"

"Party of Disenchantment."

"Does *she* like the idea?" insisted Jed with charming stubbornness. "After all, it's *her* party."

Adrienne rose. "Like it! . . . *Like it!* . . . Why, it's just like a fairy tale come true."

Bud turned to his sister. "Well, one thing, if they pull off this stunt we can see just how uncomfortable it would be—having a lot of dead relations come to life."

"And unprofitable!" supplemented Jed.

"Disenchantment!" called out Bud in the manner of a circus announcer, "a Pageant of the Sinclairs!"

"What pessimists!" laughed Justine, the faintest trace of irritation marking her forehead.

* * *

Preparations for Adrienne's party took up all the slack enthusiasm of the guests. Even Bess caught the spirit. Karl was busy sketching designs from the pictures; Mammy was cutting and snipping; Conchita Emory ripping; Mrs. Clifford Wood basting; Jane Witherspoon finishing. Justine's capacity for discovering the latent talent in each and every one was remarkable. She had sent down to the city for quantities of old clothes that were being transformed as if by magic. It *was* fun! Adrienne frankly had no needle-and-thread technique. So she was excused.

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"Besides, it's her party," Justine had explained.

Which meant that Adrienne was excluded from anything more than a glimpse of what was going on. "You're to be surprised!" said Mammy.

Adrienne protested only mildly. She hated sewing. But she was at least interested in the costume planned for *her*. "Have they started on my costume, yet? . . ."

Mammy answered. "No. . . . Your costume is all ready—finished."

"You mean—"

"You'll see when the time comes."

"But who—"

"Don't ask qustions."

"Well, if the rest know, I don't see why—"

"The rest don't know any more than you do. . . . You're just going to surprise them, that's all."

Oh, well, it really didn't matter! . . . Adrienne wanted the final effect. She wasn't keen on toiling and moiling toward it. And, besides, it gave her hours and hours with Bud. He was always saddling horses, or starting up the motor-boat, or deciding to row, or swim, or tramp. Energy . . . energy . . . Adrienne had never seen anything like it. He talked, too, talked and talked about nothing. He had no interest in books, or music, or art. His one idea was to keep going. Did she play tennis? Did she golf? Did she know anything about bowling? He was disgusted with her ignorance of sports. She said: "But I can learn. If you teach me I can learn *anything!*"

"That's the way to talk! . . . That means you *do* love me."

"Do you doubt it?"

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"Doubt it? . . . No, not exactly. . . . Still, women—"

"Women what?"

"You never can tell about them. . . . They're deep. They're indirect. . . . They never shoot straight from the shoulder."

"How can you say such a thing—with your mother. She aims directly. You know that."

"Humph . . . much I know. . . . I used to think so. . . . But lately . . . lately, I don't get her—that's all. . . . This move up here—it's funny. . . . You simply couldn't get her to consider the place. Then, suddenly— Well, she falls for it over night. . . . And this Kajetan person . . . I don't know. . . . He's a filthy swine. Like all piano ticklers. Ugh!"

Adrienne was indignant. "You're unfair. You don't understand him."

"And I don't want to. . . . What's his game hanging round here? He ought to be on his way. . . . I thought he was going to war or something. . . . He pays altogether too much attention to the mater. And he's always kissing her hand. If I were father I'd settle him."

"Well, you *are* silly! . . . That's just his way."

"He'd better not try any of that nonsense with you."

"Him! . . . He's old enough to be my father."

"That doesn't matter. . . . I know these filthy old men. With all this talk of making an artiste out of you! . . . I'll say he would."

His tone had grown suddenly offensive. "Stop!" she cried, "I won't listen to you when you talk like that!"

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He caught her in his arms. "You won't! . . . You won't! . . . *You won't!* He crushed her back, fighting for her lips. He was a boy, a man, a male animal. She resisted, laughing, blowing her cool breath into his flushed face. In the end she surrendered. What he said didn't matter, after all! To hear the rising and falling inflections of his voice was the important thing. With him insolence and love went hand in hand.

* * *

Presently the Fosdicks arrived—Carter and his father. At least that was the sequence in which they registered in Adrienne's consciousness. Carter was not just what she had expected. None of the dash and impudence of Bud—with discreet dark eyes and very perfectly outlined eyebrows; slender, a figure built for doublet and hose of the Velásquez period; thin fingers with a firm grip; silent, for the most part; with a mouth sensitive yet sensuous, red and beautifully chiseled. Adrienne wasn't sure whether she liked him or not.

Old Simon Fosdick, a thin-lipped New England ferret. Cold and steely, laughing with difficulty. Yet, with enough Bourbon (he didn't like Scotch) aboard quite a reasonable human being. Jed completely won him over.

"Didn't I tell you," exclaimed Bud, "that the old boy would fall for the guvenor. . . . The pater is a winning old bird, and don't you forget it. . . . Watch him clean up! . . . Watch him, I say."

But the person who made the most impression on old Simon Fosdick was Selina. The old man was the earliest riser of any of the guests. He was up at six.

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Selina always served him. They talked stock market gossip—reminiscence, mostly. Selina had great tales of the seventies. Con Virginia, Gold of Ophir, Standard Consolidated. She had the details at her finger's end of every stock-gambling coup that had ever been pulled.

"What do you two find to chatter about?" Adrienne demanded of Mammy one morning.

For the first time since the arrival of the Forsythes, Mammy chuckled genially and lapsed into her plantation manner.

"What does I do? . . . Why, I jest pumps him, that's what. . . . That old boy doesn't know nothin' but what stocks to play. . . . Don't you go messing round breaking into our conversation. I ain't got through with him yet. . . . By the way, what are you-all up so early for?"

"Bud and I are going riding— We're going to circle the Lake and go over to Denton's."

"Say, what you think you're doing with that Bud person? You watch your step, young lady."

There was a threatening note in Mammy's voice, the first one that had ever been there for Adrienne. Adrienne tapped her foot on the floor. She was angry. What right had Mammy to take that tack? But she decided with fine insolence to ignore it. She brought the question back to Simon Fosdick.

"He's come out here on business . . . Bud's hoping that Mr. Fosdick and his father will hit it off. . . . If they should—the Sinclair fortune will be doubled."

Mammy lifted her eyebrows. "Oh, will it? . . . That's interesting, I'm sure." The plantation manner

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swallowed up completely. Haughty and grand Mammy looked that moment. The transition struck Adrienne for the first time.

"Mammy!" she cried, "how do you do it? . . . Do you know you're two different persons!"

Mammy threw her head back. "So is everybody! . . . There's such a thing as company manners."

"But which is your real self?"

"Don't ask anybody that! . . . A real self is something that's usually covered up just like your bones are."

She turned and walked away, leaving Adrienne staring after her.

Bud was teaching Adrienne to ride. Her ignorance puzzled him.

"I can't understand it!" he would say, "living up here—with horses and everything . . . Didn't you ever think of riding?"

She wondered, now that he had raised the question, why horseback riding had never occurred to her. And, then, she knew next to nothing about swimming. With the lake at her feet! . . . Bud was contemptuous. Of course, Karl was the explanation. Why hadn't Karl thought of these things? . . . It wasn't that he lacked energy. He could tramp and spade the garden. And row, if the motor-boat broke down. But sports! . . . That was it, he had no flair for sports. Chopin and sketching and drawing plans for gardens. How feeble it all seemed, now. Mildly pleasant of course. But the physical thrill and buoyancy after a long hot ride followed by a plunge in the lake! . . . Adrienne had

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never believed that one could feel so vital, so tingling. And she was just learning about it!

"Well, which way, this morning?"

Bud sat arrow-straight in his saddle.

"I told you last night—to Denton's."

"Lead off, then. . . . Denton's isn't even a name to me."

An early morning mist from the lake still trailed along the hilltops and the smell of moist stubble was enchanting and pungent. It takes an arid country to make the most of every drop of moisture and the midsummer hills of California release a thousand perfumes at nightfall and in the early morning when dew or fog has laid a refreshing hand upon them.

Then, in the drying meadows the tar weed was springing up, smelling for all the world like incense. And the laurels and eucalypti and digger pines all added their pungence. The lake lay like a bit of pale turquoise, without a ripple. A buoyant, up-springing morning, new-washed in the purple pool of night.

They reached Denton's at ten o'clock. The little jigsaw cottage was more dilapidated than ever, the outbuildings falling in, the filth and litter indescribable. Stanley came to greet them, lean and sallow, but with a dangerous flash to his black eyes.

"Well," he said, smiling harshly, "so you came over to say good-by. . . . Didn't you know? We're pulling up stakes. We leave to-morrow."

It seemed that Mrs. Denton was ill and they had decided to take her to a hospital in Santa Rosa. Denton had a job there in one of the oil stations. Stanley was flying farther afield—to the big city, San Francisco.

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Adrienne left Stanley to chat with Bud while she went in to see Mrs. Denton. She was shocked. Mrs. Denton lay on a dilapidated red-plush sofa directing her husband as he packed a sorry array of household chattels. Mrs. Denton was dying, there was no doubt of that, and it was the first time that Adrienne had ever stepped into the presence of dissolution.

"I'm jest all wore out!" Mrs. Denton shrilled with feeble defiance. "Naturally. . . . Who wouldn't be, digging and scrubbing for thirty years."

Adrienne's stare was mildly incredulous. There was so little evidence that Mrs. Denton had been hurried to an early grave by zeal for cleanliness and order. Yet, she had worn herself out, there was little doubt of that. And, looking back, Adrienne never remembered seeing Mrs. Denton other than in a continual flutter of inefficiency. She belonged to that vast horde of systemless females of whom a rhymester of a bygone generation wrote: "A woman's work is never done!" About as damning a word spoken in the name of commiseration that ever has been uttered.

But, whatever her shortcomings, she was laid low, indeed, defenseless, save for her sharp tongue, which still retained all the vigor of bitterness and disillusionment. Adrienne had never liked her, but it was impossible not to be touched by her extremity.

"Stanley's going on to San Francisco. . . . I don't know where he got that notion. . . . He won't like it. I'm sure of that!"

The wish father to the thought! . . . A last hope that her son was not to slip from her forever. Even Adrienne, inexperienced as she was, knew better. Stan-

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ley *would* like it. And if he thought of home, at all, it would be with resentment, as one thinks of a chain and ball that once had retarded free movement.

Jim Denton said nothing. He had long since been nagged into silence. And, one felt in addition, the inarticulateness of the male in the shadow of physical suffering. He followed Adrienne out on to the porch as she was leaving.

"There ain't any hope a-tall!" he drawled. "She may live six weeks and she may live six months."

His lip trembled a bit as he said it and Adrienne put her slim brown hand upon his forearm. That was all —just a silent gesture of sympathy. He covered her fingers with his rough red palm. She hardly knew Jim Denton. And yet she felt her heart go out to him, if for no other reason, than that he was so hard pressed for grief.

She expressed this feeling to Bud as they galloped away. "I can't understand. His wife nagged him, she was a slattern, she was homely, and yet he will weep when she dies. . . . Deep down he'll be glad and yet he'll weep."

Bud drew rein. "You're a cold one!" he shot at her.

"Not at all. . . . But, I can't help wondering what makes us glad and sorry in the same breath. . . . I think there must be always the part in us that keeps acting, acting. . . . I was glad his lip trembled when he said she wouldn't live over six months. I expected him to show some sort of emotion. . . . But he can't be sorry! He just can't!"

"Oh, well," returned Bud with competent cynicism, "it's come down to habit. He's been nagged so long

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he'll miss it. . . . You see, he'll go around like a lost soul for a couple of months and the next thing you know he'll get himself tied up to another shrew."

Bud asked all sorts of questions about Stanley. "Six months in the city with decent food will make another creature of him. . . . He's half starved."

"Starved!" cried Adrienne. "Don't be silly. With milk and eggs and—"

"Salt junk and heavy biscuits! Say, it isn't only his generation. I know the kind. He comes from poor white Tennessee mountain stock. They've been the victims of bad food and mean dispositions for three centuries. . . . Most country people don't eat properly, but mountaineers— Well, there isn't any limit to the bad food they can absorb. In the end it cripples them up with rheumatism or kills them. Any bunch of statistics proves that."

"I wish we hadn't come!" cried Adrienne, suddenly vehement. "It's spoiled everything!"

"Let's gallop back—the whole way!"

"Let's!" burst from Adrienne as she brought the whip down on her horse's flank.

Bud dug his mount with spurs. In an instant they were flying through the dust toward happiness and serenity again. It is so easy for youth to turn its back upon bitterness and truth!

* * *

Long before they were within sight of Laguna Vista Adrienne cried out for a gentler pace. Bud drew a tight rein and his horse broke into a trot.

The sun was blazing now and the heat rising in pur-

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ple waves from the yellow hillsides—a dry, crackling heat, burning pine needles and fallen eucalyptus leaves to fragrant tinder.

Within a mile of home they saw the figure of Jane Witherspoon weaving in and out of madrone and manzanita. Her whole body drooped with pensiveness. Bud stopped his horse short.

"There's a tragedy for you," he said with a significant nod of the head.

Adrienne watched motionless. "What is it?" she asked, finally. "Has she a past or what?"

Bud snickered silently. "Her parents had—which was worse."

A reply of the same essence as the reply of Mammy to a like question years ago. Adrienne said nothing for a brief moment, divided between forcing a specific answer or letting the subject drop. "Her parents—I don't understand!"

"Without benefit of clergy—*you* know!"

Adrienne drew in a deep breath. "You mean,"—she halted before the ugly word—"you mean illegitimate?"

"Naturally. . . . She wouldn't go anywhere if it weren't for mater."

"What beasts people are!" burst out from Adrienne. "As if she can help that!"

"Well, if it comes to that, the world's a big place. Why crowd in where you're *not* wanted?"

Adrienne felt herself stiffen. "That's my feeling exactly. . . . I'd black boots before I'd let the sort who don't want her patronize me."

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Bud raised his eyes swiftly to meet her challenge. She sat erect, her breasts heaving.

"Ah, so there you are!" Jane's voice came floating gently toward them. "They've been looking all over for you."

"What's the big idea?" Bud flashed swiftly.

"They were wondering whether Mr. Stralendorf was with you. . . . No one has seen him since last night. It's hardly to be believed but Justine seems to think he's left. . . . His room was cleared of everything he owned. . . . He'd talked of going to Germany, it seems. . . . I suppose he hated saying good-by."

"I knew he'd do just that," Adrienne heard herself saying—"go without a word!"

"The foxy old Hun!" cried Bud.

"But how could he have been so clever?" asked Jane. "To get everything away . . . to cover his tracks so—so—"

"Ah!" cried Adrienne with fleeting warmth, "you didn't know Karl. . . . Karl could do *anything!*"

"Pooh!" said Bud with tepid and belittling scorn.

Adrienne whipped up her horse and started on again, a little confused, a little dismayed.

Karl gone! . . . And the worst of it all was—it didn't matter.

* * *

Nearer home they came upon Justine and Kajetan. They were walking along the lake shore in a thick screen of willows. Bud frowned openly. Justine waved a command to halt.

"And where have you children been?" she queried

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amiably. But her eyes held high lights of displeasure.

Adrienne thought: "How much more skillful she is at concealing her feelings than Bud."

"To Denton's," Bud snapped out.

"Denton's?"

"It's the old Fieldbusch place," Adrienne hastened.

"Ah, yes, of course, I remember perfectly, now . . . old Claus Fieldbusch. . . . Fancy, Kajetan, he was once worth a cool million. Not much money, now, but in the seventies— And can you imagine—only the other day, Jed told me that a deaf old man came into his office to answer a call for a messenger. It was old Fieldbusch. . . . Why, his entertainments up here were once the talk of the town."

Kajetan shrugged. "Life is brutal," he answered coldly.

"You mean people are!" Adrienne found herself protesting. "Mammy used to tell me about the marvelous crowds that came up and stayed weeks and weeks. Why, he had regular barracks built to take care of them. . . . Where are all those friends that ate him out of house and home? . . . They ought to be ashamed of themselves."

"Not at all," returned Kajetan coolly. "Would audiences pay to hear me if I lost my talent? . . . Assuredly not. Mr. Fieldbusch's talent, apparently, was money. When he lost that he lost everything. As I should, if my right hand were suddenly cut off. It would be tragic but I shouldn't blame anybody. Only sniveling fools do that!"

"What a stoic," laughed Justine. "I shouldn't want you for a friend if I were penniless."

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"You wouldn't have me as a friend under those circumstances, madame," Kajetan flung back insolently.

Justine colored, recovering herself with a quick laugh. Bud nervously tapped his stirrup with his whip.

Adrienne, to relieve the tension, broke in suddenly.

"They tell me Karl is gone!"

"I'm afraid so . . ."

"A silly, sentimental German, my dear young lady, afraid to say farewell."

"He might have waited for your party," said Justine, ignoring Kajetan's tone of contempt. "By the way, have you seen your costume yet, Adrienne?"

"No, have you?"

"Not a glimpse—a hint even. . . . Selina is almost too mysterious. I can't fancy quite how a young person like you can conceal her curiosity, Adrienne."

"Mammy's always been full of secrets. . . . I've grown accustomed to wondering. . . . We'll all know soon enough."

Justine smiled again but this time a trifle tartly. "The younger generation is incomprehensible, Kajetan," she observed as they both moved away.

Kajetan blew Adrienne a kiss.

"The swine—the filthy swine!" burst from Bud.

"Hush!" commanded Adrienne.

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Chapter Ten

THE evening of the Party of Disenchantment. More guests had arrived that morning—more were expected every moment. News of the affair had trickled into the society columns. Everybody was exclaiming:

"Just like Justine Sinclair—original, no end."

Re-creating an entire line of ancestors! It was tremendously diverting. There were some who were cynical.

"How about the horse thieves and card sharps? . . . Every family has them. . . . And a Southern family! Tar-brush stuff . . . Get me?"

Some of this last comment slipped by the censors of the gossiping weeklies. But the real comment was across the bridge tables.

"Adrienne Parsons—and who is she, pray?"

"That mysterious creature Justine had for a house guest last month."

"But who *is* she? . . . And why a party in her honor?"

"Search me. . . . Amber eyes, anyway. . . . Didn't you know—a strictly Sinclair failing."

"Failing?"

"Well, you know what I mean!"

Smothered laughter, raised eyebrows, thin-lipped sneers.

The tattle reached Laguna Vista. Justine had an occasional bad moment. What was she getting herself

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into? She had tried so hard to skim by the cold, hard reality of Adrienne—Adrienne Ambereyes. Ah, well, one should take hurdles defiantly. And so she reassured herself. Only once did she drop her mask. Just once, to Huntley. She said, punching holes in the smooth lawn with the blunt tip of her Japanese parasol:

"What a mess this house party is! . . . I don't know why I came up here. . . . And now that Karl has run out on me, this ridiculous disenchantment thing terrifies me. . . . Whose idea was it, anyway?"

"Kajetan's," returned Huntley, dryly.

"Ah, yes, of course. . . . Why are all foreigners so diabolical? . . . You should have warned me, Dustin. . . . You should have warned me years ago."

Huntley's voice was faintly ironical. "Against Kajetan?"

She gave him a swift glance of apprehension which merged into immediate displeasure. "Don't be ridiculous, Dustin! . . . You know quite well what I mean."

It was his turn to be disagreeable. "What could you have done?"

"You're right—nothing!"

And thus it had ended upon a note of futile exasperation.

That night Mammy deserted her post as general overseer of dinner in the Big House to have a light supper in the cottage with Adrienne at Adrienne's suggestion. Adrienne was apprehensive. Mammy had been too mysterious about the costume and her smile too covert with satisfaction.

"But when *am* I to see it?" Adrienne demanded.

"After you've eaten something, honey."

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But Adrienne couldn't eat. What was it? Why should a withheld secret upset her so at the last moment? But if Adrienne had lost her appetite, Mammy had not. She ate and chatted and drank three cups of tea, as if there was nothing of importance to follow beyond the washing of dishes.

Finally the moment arrived.

"In my room," said Mammy.

Adrienne followed her in. On Mammy's bed lay a white brocaded silk dress. Adrienne saw it through the open doorway—Elizabeth Sinclair's court dress. With the veil, the slippers, even a bouquet of Maréchal Niel roses which Mammy had gathered from the vine clambering up the veranda of the Big House, and made into a bouquet as like the bouquet in the picture as one could imagine. A sudden rush of emotion overwhelmed her. She leaned against the wall, suddenly inert and white.

"Honey!"

"I just can't! . . . I tell you I *can't,* Mammy. . . . She's too near . . . I mean the rest are all way, way in the past. But Elizabeth Sinclair—why, she's only been dead—why, she's only been dead such a little time."

"Seventeen years," put in Mammy grimly.

"Besides, Mrs. Forsythe won't like it. . . . I'm confident she won't."

"Nonsense! . . . You see, she'll be tickled to death . . . surprised at first, but after—"

"I'm not sure. Don't make me do it, Mammy, please don't! . . . Just say I'm sick. . . . Tell them I can't come."

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"To your own party! . . . Have you gone crazy? . . . Come now, let's get started. By the time I get your hair fixed and the veil and all, it will be eight o'clock. You'll want to walk around here a little and get accustomed to it. The train weighs a ton. You'll have to learn how to manage it!"

Adrienne stood out from the wall, still pale but defiant. "I tell you I won't!" she said.

Mammy went up close to her. Her voice was distinct with menace. Adrienne was frightened of her for the first time in her life. "You'll do just as I tell you, young lady. . . . Don't try any of your fine acting this late day."

Adrienne tried to be proud. "I'll do it, because it *is* my party . . . because it wouldn't be fair to run out at the last minute." She stamped her foot. "But that's the only reason—do you understand—the *only* reason. I'll never be trapped like this again."

Mammy's answer was a wide smile.

* * *

Mammy was right—the dress weighed a ton. And all the accessories—the armor-like corsets, particularly—were involved and quaint. Adrienne had to laugh in spite of her apprehension, her ill-humor. And cut so low, so terribly low, that Adrienne had a sense of being naked. Mammy remedied this with a scarf of old lace. Finally, everything was ready, down to the slender slippers which were a perfect fit. The hair drawn back into a psyche knot, the veil adjusted. In the small oval mirror over Mammy's bureau the effect was more or less fragmentary. Mammy said:

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"Let's go into the parlor. . . . There's a full-length mirror there. . . ."

Adrienne rose, dragging the incredible train after her. She stood a moment in the darkness of the prim old parlor. Then Mammy suddenly switched on the lights.

Adrienne was transfixed. Disenchanted—Elizabeth Sinclair had been disenchanted. Adrienne began to tremble. This time Mammy was a bit frightened.

"Come—come!" she said gently.

"Take them off!" cried Adrienne. "I tell you I can't! . . . I can't!"

Mammy discreetly withdrew. Adrienne stood rigid. A ghost . . . She was a ghost! . . . What was the quality that produced this uncanny effect? She didn't have Elizabeth Sinclair's features. The tilt of nose, the sweep of chin, the width of brow: none of these things were precisely a counterpart. And, yet—and yet! . . . The eyes, the proud carriage of the head, the patrician shoulders. Elizabeth diluted, modified, varied.

"Elizabeth Sinclair was your mother! . . . Elizabeth Sinclair was your mother!" she found herself repeating.

Now, after all this time, after all these years of skimming close to the surface of reality and darting away from it she could no longer keep the truth at bay. She was a Sinclair with variations! Variations supplied by a father. . . . A father! . . . For the first time she thought concretely of him.

She was still standing there when she heard footsteps outside mounting to the shallow porch. She moved away from the mirror and instinctively put out the

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lights. Then, came voices: Justine Forsythe talking to Mammy.

"Where is she? . . . I just couldn't wait any longer!"

The suaveness of Justine's tone was a challenge. Adrienne switched on the lights again. She heard the door close on Justine's entrance. Her heart was pounding but she called out clearly:

"I'm here, Mrs. Forsythe! . . . In the funny old parlor, dragging a train around!"

The next instant Justine appeared in the doorway. Adrienne had a vague sense of powdered hair and a costume to match. But details were swallowed up in the expression on Justine Forsythe's face. Amazement, incredulity, a fleeting light in the eyes that was almost terror. Then, a swift, a magnificent recovery.

"My dear! You're just too gorgeous for anything! . . . How did you ever manage it!"

There was no escape, now. Adrienne knew that she had to go through with it—completely, defiantly, triumphantly.

* * *

Justine gave the veil a competent twist, patted the lace scarf into place.

"Now let me see you walk, my dear!"

Adrienne moved like a queenly mannequin up and down the narrow room, preceded by Mammy, who went ahead clearing chairs out of her path.

"A triumph—a perfect triumph! . . . Only you'll have to be stately and that will get awfully tiresome. . . . Selina, can you detach the train? . . .

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You'd better wait in here until everybody has assembled out on the lawn. . . . I'll send some one over after you. A grand entrance, you know, like a prima donna."

She flew back to her guests, leaving Adrienne with a vague sense of having been worsted. Even Mammy looked puzzled—evidently the quality of Justine Forsythe's reaction to shock was unexpected. But Mammy decided to brazen it out to Adrienne.

"Didn't I tell you-all Justine Forsythe would be tickled to death?"

Adrienne turned upon her coldly. "You know better than that, Mammy. . . . She's a sport, that's all. . . . Besides, she wouldn't care to admit the truth even to herself."

"The truth—what you-all mean by that?"

Adrienne hesitated. "That I am Elizabeth Sinclair's child."

There, she had said it—openly, for the first time! There was a proud ring in her voice. Mammy stared. She wasn't quite expecting that tone, either. Adrienne gathered confidence.

"Of course, she'd have learned somehow—some day. But this was no way. . . . You know better than this, Selina."

Selina! . . . Adrienne could feel the impact upon Mammy of this name from her lips and Mammy's recoil. Imperceptible, almost, but like a keen knife blade it severed a relationship. Adrienne knew, now, that she would never call her Mammy again.

Selina turned on her heels and left the room. In an instant she was back with a pair of long white kid gloves.

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"Here, put these on," she commanded disagreeably. "I almost forgot them."

Adrienne took the gloves and threw them indifferently on a table. She would wear them or not, as she saw fit.

Selina stared again and withdrew. Adrienne sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands. She would have liked to weep, but the tears refused to come. . . . After a while she rose and picked up the gloves; with a little gesture of resignation she put them on. They were stiff and cold and unyielding. She gave a little shiver. No other detail of her costume had seemed so intimate, so personal, as these gloves—gloves that had once touched the very skin of Elizabeth Sinclair.

Through the open window floated strains of shattered music. It was the orchestra tuning up. Adrienne went to the door. Then out and down the path, to the gateway. She wanted a preliminary glimpse of the setting that had been provided for her.

* * *

Adrienne caught her breath. The lawn was a-shower with colored lights and the figures of servants in blue and silver pierrot costumes were laying tables. Overhead had been stretched a canopy of blue silk starred with silver. She had expected things done properly, even richly, but nothing quite as gorgeous as this. Why, it was almost as lovely as the White Ball that had brought Bess Forsythe out, the White Ball that Karl had described so vividly.

The night was warm and mellow and the air heavy

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with the scent of magnolia blossoms. Odors of heliotrope, too, were blended with it and the spice-like smell of gilly-flowers. A hum of conversation came from the veranda of the big house. Shouts of laughter and applause greeting the appearance of each participant.

The orchestra began to play, softly, seductively, a lilting waltz. Why, it was just like a scene in a play! . . . Instantly all the apprehension, all the stifled emotion, all the indignation of the past hour was swallowed up in a sense of pageantry, of drama. She saw a line of figures emerge from the veranda, sweep down the broad steps and spill over the lawn. A dark shadowy form was coming toward the cottage!

She flew up the path as swiftly as her heavy skirt and train, gathered under her arm, would permit.

"Selina! Selina!" she called. "Quick, the bouquet. They're coming for me!"

* * *

It was Dustin Huntley who came for her. She never forgot the expression on his face as he burst into the room. Selina had just handed her the bouquet. His eyes did not hold the same note of surprise, of fleeting fear that had been in Justine's. Instead he was hurt, wounded, tremendously shocked. He said in a trembling voice:

"Has Justine seen you? . . . I mean, does she approve?"

"Why, of course. . . . She's tremendously pleased."

Adrienne hated herself for this pretense. But what else could she say? Huntley looked at her with cold disapproval. "I hope this was not your idea."

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Selina stepped forward. "It was mine." Her small eyes flashed. "What's wrong with it?"

Huntley moistened his lips. "It's in bad taste. . . . Miss Sinclair isn't just a memory like the others they are bringing to life. . . . She lived with us . . . she was one of us. . . . It's monstrous, it's ghoulish!"

Adrienne felt the color mounting to her face. "I think the same thing," she said quietly. "But it's too late, now. We've got to go through with it."

Selina darted a venemous glance at both of them.

Adrienne stooped and picked up her train. "Come!" she commanded.

"Huntley's expression melted into something close to admiration. She slid her gloved hand into his arm, as she continued with a hint of gayety:

"We'll pretend we're being presented at Court . . . Very haughty and grand."

He squared his shoulders and they went out of the house and down the narrow pathway toward the lawn. Once outside, she pressed his arm gently. "I'll be grave and dignified all evening . . . I'll not do a single frivolous thing. I won't even dance. . . . This train is such a good excuse. . . . It won't seem so horrid, then, if I'm not gay, will it?"

He tapped the tips of her fingers gently. "You mustn't mind me, my dear. . . . I'm just an old fool! . . . Dance, laugh! . . . Do anything you like. . . . Remember, you'll never be seventeen again."

She knew that he was trying to put a forced warmth into his reply, but his voice sounded as hollow as a cracked bell. Even in the dim radiance of the gayly colored lanterns she could see that his face was ashen

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and the lines about his mouth deep furrowed and taut. As they neared the charmed circle somebody spied them and cried:

"Look!"

A widening silence crept stealthily over the company. A slow, congealing stillness, part confusion, part awe. *A grand entrance, like a prima donna!* At the very moment of tautness a voice called out, "Bravo!"

Shouts, applause, laughter! . . . Justine demanding a bit shrilly: "Champagne! . . . Where is the champagne!"

Scurrying blue and silver flunkies . . . popping corks . . . soft music . . . lifted glasses.

It is Kajetan who is proposing the toast:

"To Adrienne: past, present and future! . . . Three in one!"

He stands before her, devouring her with a hungry, almost a ferocious glance. Not fear not hurt nor even surprise in his eyes. But sudden revelation. Something possessive.

"How do you get that way!"

Adrienne turns to Bud, clicking her glass against his. Bud in the costume of a young ensign of 1812. Behind him, waiting, is Carter Fosdick. . . . Adrienne lifts her champagne to him over Bud's shoulder. Their glasses touch with a suddenness that emits a clear, bell-like tone.

"Thanks."

That is Carter Fosdick's only response—his toast.

* * *

The dancing was on the veranda of the Big House.

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Bud tried to drag Adrienne toward the music. She was learning not to oppose him too definitely so she said:

"Later . . . when I've gotten rid of this train."

He went away in a sulk. Adrienne turned with relief to Carter Fosdick. "I wonder if you could find a chair . . . Really, you know, these clothes weigh pounds and pounds."

He came back with a huge chair which he had filched from the great room. "These wicker things aren't in the picture," he explained.

She sank into it with a grateful sigh. At that moment the lawn was curiously deserted. "Where has everybody gone?" she asked.

"They're inside comparing themselves with their portraits. . . . It's terribly amusing. . . . You ought to go in and stand under the lady you're impersonating. . . . Really, as a matter of fact, you are the only complete success. I caught a glimpse of the picture as I came away with that chair. . . . You're—you're almost uncanny. . . . What was her name?"

Adrienne's voice dropped almost to a whisper. "Elizabeth Sinclair."

"You're related, of course, otherwise—"

"Yes," said Adrienne firmly.

"A cousin?"

"Closer than that."

"I didn't know you were related to the Sinclairs. . . . Bud never said anything. . . . I suppose he thought I knew. . . . Naturally. One glance is enough. . . . Tell me something about all these people. Just what sort are they—to the manor born, or what? Out west,

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here, you just can't tell. . . . Everybody has an air."

Adrienne shook her head. "There are dozens here I don't even know. . . . So many new people came up to-day. You see, I'm only a country cousin. . . . I've only been away from the lake once in my entire life."

"Not really! . . . That *is* good!" He gave a throaty chuckle. "You know, I thought you'd been finished off abroad . . . Paris or something even smarter. . . . You're not like American girls of your own age."

"I haven't mixed," she returned apologetically. "I've been up here alone . . . with books and just myself." She was going to say books and Karl, but she felt he wouldn't understand.

"That doesn't quite explain it," he went on stubbornly. "You're like the Sinclairs and then again you're not. . . . There's a darker strain somewhere, if you know what I mean. . . ."

He had thrown himself at her feet and he was turning his coal-black eyes on her with a glittering intensity. She felt embarrassed and the best she could do was laugh back:

"You've been spying on me."

"One would have to, with Bud around."

She flushed deep red.

"I still can't believe it!" he went on. "Why, the first night I came here you sang some German songs—charmingly. . . . You couldn't have got the rhythm—the feeling of it—up here in the wilderness."

Adrienne could not escape the fact of Karl, now, after that. She answered.

"Mr. Stralendorf taught me that."

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"Stralendorf . . . The German who ran out on the party? What was the idea?"

"He's going back to Germany—to fight!"

"Ah!"

"He just didn't want to say good-by. . . . Do you blame him?"

"Not in the least. . . . I saw only a glimpse of him, but I liked him. You say he taught you to sing?"

A sudden retrospective warmth flooded her. "He taught me to sing and everything else I know. . . . It was he who gave me that something you just spoke of —that darker strain."

"You did get me, didn't you?" His voice was vibrant with satisfaction. "Richer was what I really meant, but the word didn't come. Wine-dark the Greeks used to call it. They were speaking of the sea, of course. But that doesn't matter. It's packed with depth and color and richness. *The wine-dark sea.* Hasn't it a stirring sound? . . . But, as a matter of fact, he didn't give it to you. It was there, always. . . . You're just different, that's all."

The rise and fall of his voice moved her strangely, filled her with new and disturbing disloyalties. He was like an enticing pool whose depths at once invited and repelled. She wanted to plunge in but instead she drew back. "They're coming out, again," she said irrelevantly, indicating shadowy forms coming down the steps. "Now, just who do you want to know about?"

He turned from her with a slow, languid movement. "That woman there . . . she has all the grace of a duchess."

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"Mrs. Clifford Wood—in that draped skirt with the huge bustle? . . . Shall I really disillusion you? . . . Her grandfather was a peddler."

"Magnificent! . . . And the woman with her, in the hoops with the old Castilian name. Castro, I think."

She protested at first that she didn't know. She couldn't sit up there being catty—tearing people to pieces. But he reassured her. "What does it matter? We're not malicious. Life is interesting, that's all. We all spring more or less from dubious sources. Life originally crawled out of sea slime. Tell me, now. Who *was* Mrs. Castro?"

"Miss O'Rourke. Her father once kept a sailors' saloon and boarding-house."

"Better and better. . . . An Irish king's descendant on the upgrade, again. Completing the royal cycle."

And so it went on down the list: Forrest Deering, Conchita Emory, Stuart Clinton. Until, inevitably, Jane Witherspoon drifted past.

Adrienne pretended she didn't know whom he meant. "The crushed spinster—in mitts and a poke bonnet."

"Oh, Jane Witherspoon!" For a moment her answer hung perilously in mid-air. "You've said it—just a spinster."

"Without any history."

"None worth mentioning."

He drew up his finely penciled eyebrows. "That is magnificent of you . . . I happen to know about *her*. . . . Bud told me."

"How could he!"

Carter Fosdick shrugged. "Why not? . . . Facts

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like that aren't so important, nowadays. Our generation has a sense of humor."

* * *

Bud came back again, half petulance, half contrition. "You still here!" he cried to Carter Fosdick. The young man rose, shrugging, and melted into a passing group.

Adrienne said, "You needn't have been so rude."

She wondered at the sharp quality of antagonism her tone betrayed. Yet it always had been so even in her moments of complete surrender. Were love and hate just a matter of inevitable sequence?

If he caught the temper of her comment he let it pass. "Oh, don't you worry about Carter. . . . He's used to me. Besides, men aren't so thin-skinned. . . . When are you going to ditch that train?"

"Perhaps not at all," she answered dubiously.

"Not at all! . . . How do you get that way?"

"I half promised Mr. Huntley I wouldn't!"

"That old egg! . . . What's the big idea?"

"My costume shocked him a little. . . . You told me yourself, once, that he was fond of your aunt. It brings back things . . . this dress and all. . . . Even I can see that. It was Selina's idea. Bad taste, Mr. Huntley called it. He was right!"

"You mean you're not going to dance?"

"Yes—don't you see—"

"No, I don't. It is just a lot of sentimental rot. No one else is objecting . . . Besides you *might* do something to please *me*."

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She stood up. "You don't think I'm enjoying myself, do you?" she blazed. "I'm just trapped, that's all! I've been looking forward for days to this party—*my* party. It all sounded so stunning—so gay when they first talked about it. I want to dance, I want to laugh, I want to be happy. . . . But you can't do any of these things when you're a ghost!"

Her vehemence stirred him. "Oh, why don't you go take the damned things off! . . . Put on anything, anything that will make you human!"

She caught her breath. It was too obvious, too simple! It was like Bud to cut directly into the heart of a problem. "That's just what I'll do—this very minute!" She matched her words with a gesture that suggested poised flight, and the next instant she was speeding toward the cottage, all dignity, all repression, swallowed up in the prospect of release from an ice-thin situation. Bud followed in quick pursuit.

"Wait a second!" She halted. "Better see Bess before you chuck those togs. . . . I promised to send you up."

"Bess?"

"Don't tell me you haven't missed her. . . . Why, she hasn't been functioning for days. . . . That Hun's getaway completely floored her. . . . Nerves, she calls it!"

A little feminine pang for Bess stirred within Adrienne. Then she had been in love with Karl! "Where is she? . . . In the blue bedroom? . . . I'll go see her right away."

She recaptured her train and her dignity in one

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sweeping gesture and moved toward the big house, leaning on Bud's arm. They made a breath-taking picture as they swept up the steps—her beauty at once fragile and vital, his, stalwart and touched with a proud pugnacity. Even her entrance with Huntley dropped into insignificance. For one thing, both their costumes were more authentic than the others. In despair, Justine had been compelled to abandon Bud to the costumer. An ancestor, who had been an officer in the navy in 1812, was not easy to reproduce with a frill or two sewed down the coat front and in the sleeves of some abandoned dress-suit.

Jed met them in the hallway. He had been transformed into a southern blood of the forties by close-clipped sideburns, a fancy velvet waistcoat and a high white choker.

"We've been looking for you," he cried out gayly to Adrienne. "You're the only one who hasn't been compared. . . . Come on, now, trot right into the chamber of horrors and receive the jury's verdict!"

"Must I?" came faintly from Adrienne.

Her answer was the gentle yet distinct pressure of a determined group of spectators carrying her with them. She heard Bud swearing under his breath. At this moment, he was the male resenting a public exhibition of his private property. . . . How or by what magic the room suddenly became filled Adrienne could not determine. But, instantly, her presence seemed to have been communicated to the entire company. Jed, flushed with wine and hearty good humor, stood upon a chair bally-hooing.

"Step right up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the

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supreme revelation of the evening! . . . Positively, no charge for admission. The show is free to every one."

Adrienne felt her finger nails digging into the blue surface of Bud's sleeve, but she couldn't be resentful. Jed was simply at a high-flood of good humor and spirits. And too full of masculine obtuseness to see beneath the most obvious of surfaces. To him, Adrienne was nothing save a charming young protégée of his wife dressed in the cast-off splendor of Elizabeth Sinclair.

She let her hand slip from Bud's arm and stood, clasping the bouquet of flowers in a desperate clutch. She was just below the portrait of her mother. People pushed their way for a better glimpse, circled past her, threw her compliments, some sincere, some dubious. It was the women she shrank from. Their glances were too appraising, too intuitive. The men were, for the most part, like Jed Forsythe, without insight or penetration. She knew that Bud was standing within reach and yet suddenly he seemed miles away. Even he was uncomprehending. Annoyed that she was being stared at but beyond that without any subtle resentments. . . . Was there not a man in the room who could sense the Sinclair blood coursing through her veins? In the end, out of a confused blur of faces, she was conscious of Kajetan pushing his way toward her.

"My dear child, what nonsense!" His voice rang out with privilege, with authority. "Cannot you see, Mr. Forsythe, how pale she is? . . . This room is stifling. And such a costume—made for a Queen's

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drawing-room—well, it's little better than an instrument of torture, that's all!"

He put out his hand to her and she felt herself drifting away toward the open doorway. Once on the veranda some one brought a chair, another a glass of champagne. Kajetan dropped to his knees beside her, patting her hands.

"There, there, my child! . . . Any one should have known better! . . . You are not a trick animal to be put through paces."

The air, Kajetan's strange gentleness, revived her almost instantly. She took a sip of wine and handed her glass to Kajetan, rising.

"I'm going up to see Bess. . . . She's sick, you know."

His eyes followed her movements with rapt adoration. Then, he put his lips to the glass, drained it dry and with a quick gesture flung it upon the veranda floor. The music of shattered glass arrested for an instant a score of dancing feet.

"What! sentimental, Kajetan? . . . Who would have suspected it?"

It was Justine speaking, her voice two edged with spiteful displeasure.

Adrienne escaped, mounting the stairs to Bess' bedroom as swiftly as her costume would permit. Her last glimpse was of Justine whirling away upon the arms of her husband and a silver and blue pierrot sweeping up fragments of glass. . . . Kajetan was still gazing at her in an indiscreet half-daze.

* * *

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Bess was not in bed. She was lying on a couch piled high with pillows and at her side, upon a tabouret, a burning taper, floating in Chinese nut-oil, sent out a wan light. Her face was to the wall. At Adrienne's entrance she stirred.

"Who's there?"

"Adrienne."

"Ah!" It was impossible to describe the tone she put into this half-breathed exclamation. It had a mixture of nuances but to Adrienne it held above everything else a distinct measure of venomous anticipation. "Turn on the light!"

Adrienne found the electric switch. The flooding brilliance revealed Bess in a billow of soft blue chiffon out of which peered two self-consuming eyes.

"Well, upon my word!" Bess hoisted herself up, resting her cheek against an up-poised palm. "Who are you, anyway—a bride or what?"

Adrienne decided to meet this thrust ingenuously. "This is Elizabeth Sinclair's court dress. Her picture is downstairs, you know."

"Elizabeth Sinclair! . . . *Elizabeth Sinclair!*" Bess let her voice rise to a point of hysterical laughter. "Why, my dear child, you're a scream!" She threw herself forward on her face, stifling her mirth. "Really, you don't know how funny you are."

Adrienne drew herself up in that proud way she had practiced so many times on Selina. "These costumes are ridiculous, aren't they? I don't wonder you laugh."

Bess flashed her a look of truant confusion which

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merged swiftly into a recaptured disdain. "The dress isn't funny . . . it's *you* . . ." Adrienne made a movement toward the door. "Oh, don't go away in a huff, just because I've been frank. . . . You've got to learn to take a knock, now and then. Trouble with you is, every one makes such a damn fuss over you all the time. . . . You're just a trifle spoiled, my dear. . . . By the way, did you know Stralendorf was leaving?"

"Yes."

"He said good-by to you, then?"

"Yes . . . two weeks ago . . . one night at the Exposition."

"How romantic! . . . I suppose you have his address."

"No . . ."

"He was a beast—a filthy beast!"

By this time Adrienne was standing in the doorway. "You shouldn't say what you don't believe," she said calmly, severely.

Bess was on her feet. "What right have you to tell me what to say? . . . To tell me what I believe! . . . Damn you! . . . Damn you! . . . Damn you!"

She burst into sudden tears, covering her face with her hands, stamping upon the floor.

Adrienne turned on her heels and left. She went to the top of the stairs and hesitated. Not that way —she would go down the back flight which led into the kitchen hall and pantry. Down the back flight and across the open field, through the fig grove to the cottage. . . . She felt that if she did not get free of the clothes of Elizabeth Sinclair she would be reduced to

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the same heel-stamping hysteria that she had just quitted.

In less than five minutes she had gained the cottage and freedom. She gave a long sigh and sank upon her bed. She heard Selina moving about in the next room.

* * *

Her relaxation was brief. She came to her feet again surcharged with energy to strip herself of her ghostly finery. The veil came off first, the train, the skirt. Her eager fingers surmounted all the intricate and involved details with incredible swiftness. At last she stood free, slender, and shivering with reaction. What now? Should her exit from the party of disenchantment be complete, final? Or should she plan a discreet reëntrance? Almost before the question escaped her she knew how impossible it would be to withdraw. Bud would come seeking, demanding; perhaps, even Justine Forsythe, in the name of expedience. No, she could not desert at this hour. She was not even sure she wanted to. It was *her* party, the party she had dreamed of all her life. "Dance! Laugh!"—Huntley's words came back to her—"remember, you'll never be seventeen again!" When she had first heard them, scarcely two hours before, they had been without special significance. But, now she knew, she felt their truth. Up to this moment her life had been without conflict, but already she could vaguely discern the immediate foreground glistening with the menace of drawn swords.

She looked up to find the Adrienne of yesterday smiling with mysterious prophecy down upon her—

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the Adrienne that Karl's brush had created, the Adrienne who three years ago was standing wistfully upon the threshold of a larger estate. . . . How well she remembered the day Karl had brought her portrait back with him from San Francisco and the ceremony with which he had hung it in her bedroom. "There, Fräulein! this is to keep you young, always!" Youth enchanted and pressed into a frame. Now, for the first time, she caught the idea, complete. The quince-colored frock with the rosettes and streamers of narrow velvet, the cascades of hair flecked with sunshine, the wreath of gilded oak-leaves—just as she had been upon that first Christmas feast—so full of charm and tenderness and melancholy. . . .

Quite suddenly she knew what to do. She would go back to the party as herself. Not precisely the Adrienne of the moment, but the Adrienne of three years ago—Karl's Adrienne who had mysteriously evaporated, she knew not how, nor when. She found the wreath of gilded oak leaves done up carefully in tissue paper in the lower drawer of her bureau. The dress still hung in the huge mahogany wardrobe. . . . She had outgrown it—hopelessly. But the dress was of small moment. The wreath, the arrangement of her hair, would create the illusion. She found her last evening frock—the green one that she had worn in San Francisco. She slipped it on, then shook her hair from imprisonment. She caught it up at the back, deftly, as she had done in the old days to keep it free of her face. The wreath came next. She gave a little cry of delight as she caught her reflection. A clattering

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on the steps. Bud this time. He burst through the parlor and came beating on her door.

"Come in!" she cried.

"Well, what next! . . . What's the big idea?"

She threw up her hands in a gesture of ecstasy. "Don't you see? . . . I'm free! free! free! . . . Come —let's dance! I'll never be seventeen again, you know!"

* * *

Supper was being served at little tables spread under the blue and silver canopy when Adrienne again burst upon the company. It was Jed Forsythe who led the applause which began as a patter and ended in shouts and uplifted glasses. Why, her entrance as Elizabeth Sinclair hadn't been a patch on this! . . . Her heart beat gayly. How quickly youth could wipe out the memory of an insolence! . . . Justine was sitting at a large table in the center of the lawn.

"Here you are!" she called out. "Adrienne, this way! This is your table . . . Well, my dear child, but you *are* sensible! And what a charming idea! . . . Karl's portrait of you disenchanted. Come, now, everybody! . . . a toast to Karl . . . to the Baron von Stralendorf!"

Adrienne didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was such a relief . . . this new freedom. Being one's self . . . how good it was to be one's self. . . . Bud led her in state to her place at the table's head. They were bringing on deviled crab and hot rolls. The waiter poured her out a glass of champagne.

"Should I?" she asked. "If I keep on I'll be tipsy."

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Everybody laughed. She looked to see who was at her table. Dustin Huntley, Kajetan, Conchita Emory, Jane Witherspoon, Justine, Jed and even—here Adrienne rubbed her eyes—and even Bess. Bess with the ravages of despair smoothed out with rouge pot and powder puff. Everybody she had known intimately these last few weeks. Not a single stranger. After all, a person would have to go a long way to beat Justine Forsythe! . . . How good everybody was to her! How many other girls at seventeen could have such a marvelous party?

People drifted over from the other tables to touch glasses with her. Forrest Deering, first.

"Some day, I'm going to be a permanent bachelor!" he said to her under his breath. "Don't forget that!"

"Shame on you!" called out Justine. "You're making the child blush. . . . What did he say, Adrienne? . . . Well, to-morrow, then. You can tell me to-morrow."

Carter Fosdick came over, too. . . . He pressed her hand. "This is better," was his only comment.

Dustin Huntley leaned across the table. "Thank you!" he cried.

Everybody seemed gay. Even Bess forgot to be spiteful. Suddenly all the lights went out. In the distance loomed the figure of Selina, bearing a white frosted cake with seventeen twinkling candles.

More applause . . . glasses uplifted, again. . . . Adrienne took a deep breath and blew every candle out. The lights came on, the orchestra struck up a quick-step. . . . Two pierrots bearing a huge basket between them. Presents . . . birthday presents. A whole bas-

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ketful of them. Adrienne stood gasping. A servant whispered to Justine who said: "The farm hands? . . . Yes, by all means, now. . . . Bring them right in." The servants trotted away and appeared almost instantly, followed by four shy figures—sour-smelling Joe, Ferguson, Felix the Basque shepherd, Carlborg—bearing gifts. They made little awkward bows and departed. . . . The tears came now.

"Oh! Oh! . . ." wailed Adrienne. "I'm so happy! . . . *I'm so happy!*"

* * *

Four o'clock in the morning. The party a bit at tag ends. Many of the women had retired. Most of the men were pleasantly tipsy. Justine said to Adrienne: "My dear, don't you think we've all had enough?" For once Bud was ready to release her. Whether for her edification or his freedom it was hard to determine. A mixture of both impulses, perhaps. But Adrienne had a suspicion that the punch bowl had its part in his attitude: the punch bowl about which all the males were uproariously clustered. She gained her bedroom with not the slightest intention of sleeping. . . . Sleep, with every nerve in her body tingling! . . . It was inconceivable. She threw a scarf about her shoulders and went out into the air again. Morning was coming with a faintly green prophecy. . . . Noises from the Big House drifted in shattering waves toward her—laughter, snatches of song, the clatter of champagne buckets being emptied of ice. She heard Bud's voice raised above the general chorus. There was a note of unrestraint, of freedom, in it. . . . Ah, well, men were like

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that, she supposed. Her mind was a kaleidoscope of fragmentary thoughts. She wanted to get away where it was completely still. She ran down the path and through the gate toward the hills. Up, up, she mounted. . . . She stopped, finally, in a little thicket of hazel bushes opening toward the lake. She sat down. The dawn was flushing rosily now—the lake lay inert, a crystal mirrror, into which daylight peeped. . . . Birds began to twitter; from some distant ranch-house came the voice of a crowing cock. . . . This was the first time in her life she had ever seen the sun rise. . . . How curious, to have lived all her life in the country without this experience! It struck her, now, for the first time. It was the same with her ignorance of horses, of swimming. A lake at her feet that she had never so much as paddled in. She was like a child born, in spite of everything, in the city's thrall. . . . The city! . . . In what direction was it? . . . South and a bit to the west—south and west. She lifted her finger, pointing. A thrill came over her—the city! . . . How she loved it. . . . How she had always loved it —ever since the days that Selina had enlarged upon its glories. It had been, from that first moment, a dim and distant glory, something to be achieved—like immortality and the new Jerusalem. . . . Yes, she was born to love it. . . . *Born.* She thought of her mother, concretely, now—without the necessity of keeping the subject at bay. . . . Elizabeth Sinclair. It was not the idea that was new, but the complete possession of it. To have and to hold it always. Never to be robbed of it—ever. The circumstances didn't matter. The important thing was to have been born at all . . .

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born under any hazard as the child of her mother. The thrill, the pride in Sinclair blood, swept her. A fierce pride, jumping full grown from a clan consciousness bred of race and bone; curious, indefinable, unquenchable.

She became lost in the wonder of it, caught up in a transfiguration of ancestral worship. Every word that Selina had ever told her about the Sinclairs came back to her—the good, the bad, the indifferent. . . . Even the Sinclair faults assumed a strange magnificence.

The snapping of a twig brought her to her feet with a cry. She turned. Kajetan was emerging through the hazel thicket. Her face must have mirrored a virginal terror, for he fell back slightly, lifting a paternal finger.

"My dear child! . . . Surely you trust me. . . . What was it? Did I disturb a reverie? . . . Of what were you thinking?"

The sharpness of her relief brought the truth to her lips. "I was thinking of my mother."

He came forward on the last word. "How odd—how fortunate, just when I have come to talk to you about her."

* * *

She said as she sat down again quite naturally, without betraying her surprise: "You knew my mother?"

He threw himself at her feet, sprawling full length on the dry stubble. "Better in some ways than any one."

"What was she like?"

"Such a question! . . . Adorable . . . as you are!"

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"When did you first meet her? . . . Where? How was she dressed? . . . Tell me, everything! . . . I'm hungry for news." She brought her hands up to her breast in an ecstasy of entreaty.

He gave one of his quick, purring laughs, full-throated with tolerant amusement. "How was she dressed? . . . What a question! Let me see. . . . In blue . . . yes, I'm quite sure she was in blue. I first saw her coming down stairs. In the half-gloom of a hallway. . . . At first just a moving blur. Then, suddenly, she had come into the room. It was as if one had lifted a shade. . . ." He halted, turning the phrase over in his mind. "Yes—that says it, perfectly . . . as if one had lifted a shade. . . . You have that same quality."

She wanted to say: "How did you know she was my mother? Was it the court dress? . . . Or had you guessed before?" But a sudden gust of shyness seized her. For the moment she realized that he was a stranger and scarcely the fitting person to tread delicate ground with. Instead it was he who put the question. "How long have you known?"

"That she was my mother? . . . Almost always . . . But to-night for sure. . . . To-night there was no mistake." She answered simply, the sense of his former remoteness wiped out by the gentleness of his manner.

"You had a father, too. . . . Do you ever think of him?"

She felt a flush upon her cheeks. "Very seldom—scarcely at all. . . . To-night, for the first time, I

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looked at myself in the glass and I said: 'You have a father' . . . And, later, one of the guests told me I had a wine-dark strain. That was my father. I feel sure of that."

"Wine dark . . . wine dark!" he repeated musingly. "Ah, that is good. I like that."

Something in his voice communicated a tremulous hope to her. "Perhaps . . . perhaps," she faltered, "you knew my father, too."

His glance went through her. "I wonder if I did!" he mused. "Do we ever? . . . What I mean is, do we ever know the thing closest to us? . . . That was years ago. Sometimes I think I knew him and then, again, he is gone—he escapes me. . . . We are always the same person—yet made up of ten thousand creatures. . . . You see, I have a wine-dark strain, too."

His steady gaze still seared her. She turned away from him with a little shiver and she said: "I understand. *You* were my father."

"Were! *Were!*" he cried with stirring vehemence. "You mean I *am* your father!"

She gave him a twisted smile. "Since when?" she asked.

A flush of anger died from his face leaving him ashen white. "From this moment, if you wish it."

From this moment! . . . She closed her eyes in swooning happiness. What did the years that were past matter when with a word, a phrase, a sentence, everything could be put right?

"Well?" His question was taut with suspense.

She opened her eyes, shrinking a little from his gesture of approach.

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"Tell me first about my mother!" she pleaded. "Tell me *everything.*"

He began to talk, moving his hands. . . . He had all the earnestness, all the eloquence, all the dramatic fire of an advocate pleading his case before a stern tribunal.

She listened with a fitful happiness, now clear, now clouded. Slowly, slowly the sun pushed its way like a squeezed orange up through the mists that veiled the lake. When he had finished she said quietly: "See, it is morning."

He took her hand and kissed it.

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Chapter Eleven

JUSTINE FORSYTHE saw the dawn come also. But its pageantry meant nothing to her. She was too preoccupied. She tried to marshal her thoughts into a coherent channel, but at first only a surge of absurdly unrelated subjects crowded her musings. How long would Kajetan stay? . . . Why had she given the party of disenchantment? . . . What subtle undercurrents of knowledge gave Carter Fosdick such quiet assurance? . . . The smashed champagne glass in Kajetan's absurd scene with Adrienne; Selina's smirking competence; Bess and her obvious case of nerves; when Jed was planning to go back to town . . . Questions and speculations milled round and round without a focal point . . . But, gradually, out of the welter of fragments loomed the vital fact about which every lesser one revolved: the presence of an amber-eyed young woman at Laguna Vista. . . . She had not admitted the truth then but, years ago when the first intimation of such a child at the lake had come through Karl von Stralendorf, a wisp of fear had passed over her content. Impalpable, intangible, almost as unnoticed as the first puff of fog drifting across the sun's face in the high light of a midsummer afternoon. Yes, it had just that quality. The hot sunshine falling in a gilded deceit about you; your eyes turned lazily out to sea. Suddenly the barest suggestion of a shadow falls. Where? . . . What? . . . But it is gone before you can capture its mood, its quality, much less the cause.

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. . . Yet, if you but thought, you would know how many times the same subtle warning had been thrown out by the sky. If you but thought, you would know that this is merely a forerunner of wisp upon wisp of fog, gathering flockwise into a continuous veil that in an hour will completely hide the sun's face and by nightfall wrap the hills in a dripping mantle and shut out the stars. . . . But when the sun shines so hotly and the sky is so fair, so blue, who believes the lessons of experience? And, granting the warning, what is there to do? . . . One cannot sweep away mists as one sweeps away cobwebs. . . . If the sea is determined to yield up its spirit as a shroud for sunlight, what can one do but sit shivering until the sun comes out again?

That was it: what could she have done? . . . Taken the next train for Laguna Vista and demanded facts? For what? . . . For the mere color of a child's eyes?

Now that she thought of it, the first warning had come years before Stralendorf had chattered away her sense of absolute security. How about that afternoon when Dustin Huntley had come to her and said: "Selina Parsons would like to end her days in Laguna Vista"? Why hadn't she been more sharply aggressive then—looked into things? . . . After all, Selina Parsons had no rights where the Sinclairs were concerned. Except the rights of a curious indulgence which the old Judge always had granted her. Justine had heard most of the oddly assorted rumors as to just why the Judge found this old black harridan so amusing. But she had been indifferent to them. The important fact was that the old Judge *had* found Selina amusing, that he was toler-

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ant of her. . . . But this alone did not explain Justine's nonchalant compliance with such an outrageous request. It really had not taken Huntley's, "From her tone, I should say it would be discreet to grant her request" to help her reach a decision. She had been coerced before that by the mere memory of Selina's sinister personality. She still remembered the look of venom that two black eyes had snapped out at her on that afternoon when Selina had called to pay her last tribute to Washburn Sinclair. A black old sphinx with a magnolia blossom in her hand. The look had burned itself into Justine's consciousness. She knew, at once, that Selina had overheard what she had said. "That filthy old nigger!" Well, she had meant it. Everybody in San Francisco knew Selina's history.

Perhaps Judge Sinclair's position had been secure enough to indulge his fancy for such questionable characters. But why continue such a contact, now that the Judge was dead? . . . That had been her position then. Why hadn't she kept to it? . . . Had there been something in that look at once fascinating and frightening?

Up here at Laguna Vista, Selina's manner had been irreproachable. Too irreproachable, if it came to that. Even her challenges had been suave to the point of subtle insolence. That night, particularly, when Kajetan had asked Adrienne where she was born. Justine could still reconstruct the scene perfectly. Selina with the tray of black coffee stepping calmly into the spotlight and answering before Adrienne could reply for herself. "At Laguna Vista—seventeen years ago, lacking a week." Had it been self-protection, instinctive

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and swift, that had made Justine leap in flashingly with, "In this very house, wasn't it, Selina?" At the time she was scarcely conscious of framing this observation. It was upon her lips and finished before she quite had grasped its implication. But everybody in the room had stared so, had seemed to be unconsciously hanging upon the issue. There was simply nothing left to do but brazen the thing out. Besides, it was time to begin to build up a background of some sort for Adrienne.

Up to this point, the people of Justine's set had accepted the child as an interesting fact without any outward signs of suspicion, of curiosity. But Justine knew that this could not go on indefinitely. . . . Sooner or later Adrienne would have to be explained. . . . After to-night, the explanation would need to be pretty complete, pretty convincing. Now that Justine faced it, she could not dodge the issue which Selina Parsons had raised by clothing Adrienne in the robes of Elizabeth Sinclair.

Selina Parsons was planning what Justine had suspected almost from the first—to fasten the name of Sinclair upon this foundling with amber eyes, produced from God knew where. . . . Of course the child wasn't a Sinclair at all. Or, if she were, from some remote strain too distant to have any claim, beyond the claim of uncanny resemblance.

In University circles Justine had heard no end of scientific discussion about inheritance and sports and throw-backs whenever the subject of heredity was raised. Her father's dearest friend had been a botanist experimenting with plant breeding and his results

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and deductions always had a touch of the miraculous about them. Many times Justine had heard him say: "In the sixth generation, mind you, just as I thought I had completely wiped out all trace of those pink spots on the rim of the blossom, why, if it didn't pop out again, even more clearly defined." If Adrienne was anything at all she was just one of these irrepressible blossoms, removed no end from the parent stem, suddenly running true to the old form. A forty-second cousin, as the colloquial phrase had it.

Or she might be nothing more than a mere trick, a "sport" of nature; a duplicate thrown by the potter's wheel without rhyme, or reason, or even remote connection with preceding types. However, whether far or completely removed from Sinclair sources mattered little. The fact remained that in some subtle, some uncanny fashion, this Adrienne Parsons, so called, had managed to achieve something beyond a mere resemblance to the Sinclair tribe in general, and Elizabeth Sinclair in particular. She had the Sinclair manner. Justine had caught the first suggestion of it in Karl von Stralendorf's portrait. And, again, she had had a disturbing sense of that quality the first day she had met Adrienne face to face. At every turn since then the confirmation of this amazing puzzle had forced itself upon Justine Forsythe's unwilling consciousness. It was marvelous, indefinable, tantalizing.

There was only one explanation—fantastic, perhaps, but at least comforting. It must be the atmosphere of Laguna Vista, or rather, the psychic influence of its old associations, its old personalities, its visionless ghosts, absorbed, translated, appropriated by the un-

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canny genius of Selina Parsons. Yes, genius was the only word. A mysterious sixth sense which primitive people could master and use to serve their own ends. Under this hypothesis, it was no accident, no mere whim, which had moved Selina to ask for a home at Laguna Vista. Here she had brought this child, with no other purpose than to saturate her with the intangible spirit of dead and gone influences. The very house, the furnishings, the silent portraits on the walls—how mysteriously charged they were, as all such records of vanished days are, with the spirit, the manner of those who had planned, touched, lived among them. This was what that vague term atmosphere meant. And, if one lived long enough in a certain atmosphere, one caught its flavor, became stamped with it.

The more Justine pondered this, the more convincing, the more rational it became. Given a child with amber eyes, a gentle strain of blood, and what else was necessary to stamp it with authenticity than seventeen years in the shadow of Sinclair atmosphere? . . . And, if there were no living people to communicate characteristic airs and graces, the dead at least smiled down from its silent walls. *Enchanted and pressed into frames!* That had never been the child's idea. Justine was sure of that. The suggestion of mystery and magic must have emanated from Selina. Ah, what dangerous, fertile imaginations this jungle breed had! . . . How Selina must have hammered all her suggestions into the young, pliable consciousness. How many times she must have stood her charge before the picture of Elizabeth Sinclair, letting the child's imagination take sudden fire from carelessly dropped words,

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hints, suggestions. . . . How many times the Court dress with its sweeping train and veil must have been unwrapped from its linen and lavender and trailed across the floor by a skinny negro hand. . . . How many times had the child herself played at make-believe before one of the casually unveiled mirrors, mincing into an imaginary Queen's drawing-room in the equally imaginary robes of Elizabeth Sinclair. And, in these later months, how many times had the child, now grown to a quick, miraculous maturity, encased herself in the corseted finery and rehearsed a significant rôle!

And the supreme question of all—How much was the young woman herself party to the deceit? . . . Or had she been reared in the belief that her claims were valid? . . . Claims. A disturbing word. Yet one that must be faced. Claims. What would they consist of? . . . How far would Selina go with her demands? . . . A lump sum outright or something very much beyond that, involving certain recognitions, certain humiliating concessions in addition to financial compensation? . . . If one were dealing with an ordinary blackmailer one could have gauged an approximation of the terms—at least, the issue would have hung upon a question of money pure and simple. But Selina was different. One could not fix the precise measure of the tribute she would levy. . . . What label would Selina place upon Adrienne's hitherto unclassified impersonation? A child of the now shadowy Palmer Sinclair, doubtless. Justine remembered him only very slightly. A youth of great charm, everybody conceded. Dead these many years. But a death so unconfirmed, so vague, as

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to be thoroughly clouded. He had gone away with the first boatload of American troops to the Philippines. A dashing lieutenant in the cavalry. Women, drink and the tropics had done their worst for him. Some said he had been murdered in a drunken row in a low half-caste dance-hall in Manila, others maintained that he had committed suicide for the love of a questionable lady of mixed breeds somewhere in China. At least, no one had ever heard from him, and, in moments of insecurity which Justine very occasionally indulged, he was the one figure that sat Banquo-like at the feast of her content. What would happen if Palmer Sinclair were one day to return in the full flush of a degenerate penury and demand an accounting? What if he had not died either by his own hand or another's? After all, he would be Judge Sinclair's heir-at-law. Nothing could wipe out that fact but his death. And, as Judge Sinclair's heir, he would be entitled to every farthing of the estate. . . . The prospect, remote and almost fantastic, always left Justine cold. Poverty, penury, again—genteel poverty the most harrowing of all—not the frank, shiftless, happy-go-lucky poverty of those to empty purses born. . . .

That Palmer Sinclair had left any issue was inconceivable, yet Justine conceded that Selina Parsons was shrewd enough to seize upon the uncertainty of his death to serve her ends. . . . If she made any effective claims for her protégée they would probably be claims emanating from the hectic career of the gentleman in question. To-night she had fired the first definite gun in her program—a gun that could scarcely be ignored. What would be the most efficient way of returning

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fire? . . . After all, Adrienne herself was a decided factor. Upon her attitude hung the whole issue, and more than one victory had been won by desertions in the ranks. To win Adrienne over. That was a possibility. . . . And, as Justine pondered ways and means and expedients, she was conscious that the figure of Bud loomed as effectively upon the horizon of her hopes as any other. . . . Bud and Adrienne. It was not just what she had desired and yet her common sense told her that she could go farther and fare much worse.

* * *

Her speculations were broken in upon by the rather bedraggled revelry going on under her window. What children men were! Did they never know when to quit? . . . She threw a film of silk crêpe across her shoulders and opened the window wider. There they all were, led by Jed, Bud, Carter Fosdick, Dustin Huntley, Forrest Deering, shouting a banal song:

"My name is Yon Yonson, I come from Visconsin,
I vork in the lumber yards there!"

Over and over again with some rhyme but certainly no reason. Fancy *women* being so silly! . . . But that was just it—women couldn't be so silly, so lacking in self-consciousness. That was what kept men young. She couldn't help feeling tolerant at that moment. Their gayety was so reassuring. She counted them again. Jed, Bud, Carter, Dustin and Forrest. All but Kajetan! Well, of course that was to be expected. Kajetan lacked the boyish quality which was

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the outstanding trait of all the men of the same breed as herself.

The thought of Kajetan sobered her. . . . She was not satisfied with Kajetan, much less with herself. Just what was he doing at Laguna Vista? Why had she invited him? . . . It was the first time she had touched the issue firmly. His assurance, his insolence, his patronizing manner. Was it conceivable that he had gauged her reasons far better than she had herself? . . . The first time he had come to have a cup of tea at her invitation his plans had been very definite. He was going East almost immediately on mysterious matters of state. She had pressed him to stay for a dinner party. He had consented. Then came the house party at the lake. It had all been very flattering. The great Kajetan, who only had seen fit to spare San Francisco one recital, to be persuaded against his duties to stay on! What was its significance? . . . Had the years, after all, given her a firmer grasp on feminine wiles, feminine seductions? . . . The snaring of Kajetan had been almost a challenge. What woman alive but would derive satisfaction from pitting her charms against the arrogance of genius? . . .

Twenty years before she had played a one-sided game, delivered her quarry deliberately into the hands of greater sufficiency, if not greater experience. Her present gestures in the same direction had assumed in her mind the attributes of vindication. She didn't like to concede that Elizabeth Sinclair had been the better woman. What was really the basis of this mellow madness which had seized her? . . . Did she account the beguiling of Jed Forsythe as nothing?—handsome,

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dashing, winning Jed Forsythe for whom every dowager with marriageable daughters had once set a snare? . . . To be truthful, the issues were not in the same class. It took only the most obvious tricks to catch a man as uncomplex as Jed Forsythe. And, having caught him, there was the accident of inherited fortune to make her conquest lasting. She never could completely discount that fact. Money, on the other hand, meant nothing to Kajetan. If it had, what had prevented him from marrying Elizabeth Sinclair? . . . What indeed? This question struck her squarely now, for the first time. . . . She would have to ask Kajetan that some day when she knew him better.

When she knew him better! . . . In that phrase she answered her question almost too completely. . . . She went over to her dresser and sprinkled some perfume on the tips of her fingers. The odor enveloping her in a voluptuous cloud gave her a sudden uprush of passionate feeling. She thought of Kajetan directly, straightforwardly, boldly—of the overpowering physical attraction of the man, his thick, black hair, his sharp, white teeth, the curving brutality of his lips. . . . She wondered if he were in his room. . . . How stupid of her when it was already broad daylight . . . almost morning.

* * *

Her disquiet was so overwhelming, so undisguised, that instinctively she fled behind a screen of more impersonal speculations. . . . What about Bess's problems? . . . Fancy being so stupid, falling in love with Karl von Stralendorf! . . . If it hadn't been for this

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wretched war that might have been a brilliant match. . . . Granting Karl had ever cared a rap, which wasn't likely. Still, a fortune might have fetched him. A baronial estate, somewhere on the Rhine, rehabilitated with sound American dollars. An entry, doubtless into the brilliant life of the German capital. Justine would have liked that. Especially as she flattered herself that she knew something of the German psychology through contact with her father's German associates at the University. . . . At heart the most arrogant German was incurably sentimental. Witness Karl and his ridiculous attachment for Adrienne. For after everything was said and done, it was faintly ridiculous—this paternal mothering of a child. She couldn't conceive Jed playing such a game, or Kajetan, even. . . . Kajetan, again. . . . Jed and Kajetan in insistent juxtaposition. . . . Of what had she been thinking . . . the main thread . . . why? . . . Ah, of course, Bess . . . Bess, with ravaged eyes and a pretense of physical suffering. What nonsense! Everybody could see the child was lovesick. Just when she ought to be at her best. Carter Fosdick. What a chance! . . . Not only because of the money back of him. But background—social position. Every exclusive drawing-room in New York open to him. The Sinclairs were infinitely better stock. But family and breeding weren't the only passports to the inner circles of the American metropolis. Southern pretensions had suffered a decline of late years. There had been too many pretenders. Any one living south even of a railroad track had been assuming airs. Well, it wasn't too late. She'd have to find something to ruffle Bess's pride, put her on the defensive. . . . Jed was getting along famously with

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old man Fosdick. Justine liked that. It gave Jed a touch of business competence which he had always seemed to lack. Not that Justine wanted her husband a financial shark, but a little shrewdness was never to be sniffed at in a man.

Young Fosdick had depth, too. He would be fascinating game to angle for. Bud was pretty shrewd, establishing such a likely contact. Jed hadn't been too keen about Bud's going East for college. Justine hoped he realized, now, that there was point to Harvard. California and Stanford might be good enough for a year or two. But, if one were making any gestures at all in the direction of exclusiveness, Cambridge was the place. What she should have done was to have sent Bess off to a convent in Paris for a dash of manner. It was no use denying the present generation of American girls were smeared with a strident vulgarity that just missed being gauche. Witness, Adrienne. What was she thinking of? Adrienne wasn't a product of Europe. But essentially wasn't she? Karl's influence, for instance. . . . That and her detachment from life. It had done something subtle for her. A strange, interesting creature, after everything was said and done. . . . Bud would end by finding her disturbing. But she would be always enormously diverting. And full of sparkle and poise. The more she thought of the idea, the better she liked it. . . . Besides, it would be worth some sacrifice, some compromise with her maternal hopes, to worst Selina. To kick the props from under the old hag's pretensions. . . . She'd talk to Jed about it. As if Jed's opposition or concurrence mattered. This was always a deferential gesture she made whenever her mind was quite made up on any

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subject. Speaking to Jed about anything was always proof positive that the issue had been settled.

* * *

The sun was up, high up, beating into the east window of Justine's room. The men had stopped singing. One by one they had stamped unsteadily to their quarters. Justine could hear Jed rummaging in his room next to hers. She looked at her watch—six o'clock. If it had been cool she would have drawn the shades and slept. But the air was already hot with a touch of north wind that had cleared the lake of its early morning mists. It was impossible to be comfortable at such a temperature. And, besides, the least hint of a norther always put Justine on edge—a discomfort indulged in by all born Californians.

She decided to dress for a walk. The air along the lake shore would do her infinitely more good than a disordered sleep in this hot, stuffy room. She chose a cool, cream-colored silk sport dress with a wide-brimmed hat of plain straw. She had to acknowledge that her reflection in the mirror was quite to her satisfaction, quite to her taste. She looked neither haggard nor old, in spite of every reason for betraying such symptoms. And her costume was as correct and suitable as one could imagine. With reason. For Justine's philosophy included keeping up to a perfect scratch when one might have said there was the least expectation, demand for it. It was a spiritual gesture translated into terms of the best possible form. This morning, of all mornings, there was not the barest chance of meeting a soul abroad, and yet she looked her smart-

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est. But the truth was that Justine dressed for her own self-respect, her own self-satisfaction. She abhorred and detested let-downs. She never could be on any decent terms with herself in figurative curl papers.

In the halls the air was still cool, undiluted by the hot breeze or the sun's precocious fury. Not a soul was stirring, not even the servants usually tiptoeing about on preliminary tasks. As she passed Kajetan's door she saw that it was ajar. A shaft of torrid light spilled through the crack into the tempered gloom. How stupid of any one to be sleeping on such a morning without drawn shades! But her passing glance revealed a glimpse of a bed undisturbed. Could it be that Kajetan was still up, stirring, perhaps, as she was? A ramble in the morning air would do him good. She retraced her steps and tapped discreetly on the door; failing to attain a response she suddenly flung it open. He was not there. She would meet him outside, then. He was not a man who indulged in walks beyond a safe and easy return.

She floated eagerly down the stairs and out into the morning light. The lawn was trampled and ragged and the blue and silver canopy bellying in the freshening wind looked faded and a bit ridiculous.

As she prepared to descend the veranda steps to the garden, her canvas shoe turned upon what she at first thought was a pebble. She captured her balance swiftly and kicked the offending particle into the walk below, her eyes instinctively following the speeding fragment in its downward flight. It was a piece of glass. A piece of glass left from the goblet that Kajetan had shattered last night with such a theatrical flourish. The

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memory pricked Justine's hard-won complacency. What could have possessed him? . . . So silly and ridiculous, making such a romantic gesture toward a young girl like Adrienne! Jed had been furious, for once. "Somebody ought to tell him that sort of stuff isn't being done except in disorderly houses," had been his pointed comment. . . . Of course it meant nothing. . . . Kajetan perhaps had drunk a little too much. Temperamental people rarely held their liquor discreetly. He would probably have done the same thing with any other woman's wine glass. It was just one of those florid gallantries, showy, empty, that foreigners seemed to think necessary to the happiness of the opposite sex. Smashing a wine glass so that no other lips would ever desecrate it! Ah, well, it probably had given the child a thrill even if she hadn't quite grasped its full significance. Justine quieted her irritation on this generous conclusion and turned her steps toward the lake shore.

The path she chose lay in the direction of Selina's cottage, a rambling approach to her objective, to be sure, but one shaded, as it veered sharply from the cottage's cypress hedge, by a meandering line of purple-gray eucalypti.

The fragrance of Selina's garden leaped over the hedge and toward her. As usual, her response to gracious odors gave her a fresh sense of pleasure, intensified her recaptured assurance. Her mood of the dawning hour was gone. She ceased to have any fears, any uncertainties. Her mind was quite made up—she would clip Selina's claws by marrying Adrienne off to Bud. Bess's troubles would be solved by snaring

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Carter Fosdick. This last might have to be maneuvered skillfully, but she was no mother if she could not manage a couple of inexperienced young folk. Indeed, the prospect before her suddenly teemed with interest—Particularly the routing of Selina Parsons. She had remembered hearing the old Judge admit, many times, that Selina was always a match for him. What a satisfaction to accomplish what experience and a judicial temperament failed to achieve!

As she neared the cottage gate she found herself tiptoeing. But the next moment she was laughing at her absurd caution. As if anything could wake Adrienne! Adrienne must be sleeping the exhausted sleep of youth. What capacity for happiness and sleep seventeen years possessed. The child had been marvelous, simply marvelous, last night. Was it chance or instinct that had given her the grace to rid herself of an offensive masquerade and finish out the last hours as her own charming self?

A glimpse of a scarf fluttering above the low-clipped hedge startled Justine, then held her at arrested attention. She stopped before the gate and peered through the green frame of cypress arched above it. Adrienne was standing on the step of the shallow flight leading to the cottage door. Kajetan was kissing her.

* * *

Justine stood inert at first. The surprise was too complete, too tremendous to produce shock. There followed a moment of physical weakness verging upon nausea when every drop of blood she possessed seemed to have fallen to a stagnant level. Then, life came

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pounding back to her temples, suffusing her in a flush of indignation. Jealousy, outraged hospitality, an almost maternal fury—recurrent waves of each and every one of these passions swept her. But in the end, the maternal overwhelmed all the rest. A child, a woman of seventeen, trapped by this lascivious beast! Under a roof that should have afforded protection to innocence! . . . Ah, well, perhaps it hadn't gone beyond the first comparatively innocent preliminaries. The smashed wine glass—it *did* have point, then! . . . So this was why Kajetan had dallied at Laguna Vista —stayed on past all expediency!

She heard his step crunching down the garden's graveled walk and through the cypress-crowned gateway. She opened her parasol with a quick gesture to cover her agitation.

"Ah, Mrs. Forsythe, abroad early, too? . . . I never saw you look more charming!"

He advanced to kiss her hand, but she withdrew with a movement of recoil that could scarcely have escaped him. Yet her voice was suave, touched with just the proper note of vivacity as she said:

"Have you been walking—already?"

"Hours ago . . . I went half-way up the hillside." He swung round, pointing with his cane.

She mustered all her archness for her next question. "Alone?"

He tightened his glance. "Alone, naturally."

She flung her parasol defensively upon her shoulder. "You are a liar, Kajetan . . . a despicable liar!"

He squared himself. "My dear madame!"

"You went up that hillside with Adrienne. . . . In

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the early morning—alone with a young girl . . . an innocent girl. . . . Upon my word, if I had a whip in my hand, Kajetan, I'd thrash you. . . . You can't bluff me. I saw you not ten seconds ago kissing her. Don't attempt to deny it."

She had never seen such dangerous pallor in a man's face. "I have no intention of denying it, Mrs. Forsythe. But, since I am your guest—for no other reason, understand—since I am your guest, I demand an opportunity to explain."

"Explain! . . . What, pray? . . . If you were a young man—thoughtless, impetuous, there might be something to say in your defense. But you—old enough to be the child's father—"

Something in his look stopped her. "That is just the point, my dear madame, I *am* old enough to be her father . . . If you will be good enough to lead the way we shall discuss this matter privately, in a more fitting place."

She bowed to him ironically and swept forward toward the big house. She could hear his confident footsteps following her. She was divided between a contemptuous triumph and a vague fear. In the main room, surrounded by the Sinclair ancestors smirking down upon them, she turned and faced him.

"If you will permit me," he said. And he closed the door.

* * *

At first she was stunned, so stunned that Kajetan's exit was achieved without her being aware of it. Or if she sensed that he had gone she was too dazed

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to note it—to really care. . . . The child of Elizabeth Sinclair! Justine clenched her fists, beating them in futile rage against the arm of her chair. Not because the fact was shameful or that it threatened the whole economic fabric of her existence. No, her reactions were more primitive, nearer the emotions than that. The child of Elizabeth Sinclair and Kajetan—that was the rub. Kajetan! She might have known. And yet, Elizabeth—clever, cool, self-contained Elizabeth, the heir to millions, trapped as completely as a kitchen wench by a stable groom. . . . It was funny, actually funny. It made one laugh! Elizabeth Sinclair, slinking away like a furtive animal to a secret deliverance. Who had managed everything so skillfully? . . . How had it been covered up?

She remembered the letters she had received from Elizabeth on her last visit to Laguna Vista. They had been commonplace enough. Yet such a long sojourn without apparent companionship had seemed a bit strange at the time. But the Sinclairs were noted for occasional and decisive eccentricities. And Elizabeth had been no exception to this rule.

Justine had put it down to social boredom and let it go at that. After, when Elizabeth had died within a few days of her arrival home from the lake, the further excuse of ill health had made her actions more understandable. Though why she should have ignored all her family physicians and put herself in the hands of a ridiculous-looking old quack that nobody had ever heard of, had raised a question for the moment. An acute affection of the kidneys. That was the way the death certificate, duly signed and sworn to, had put the matter. Naturally it had passed muster. What

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reason did any one have to suspect otherwise? . . . Foul play, abortion, shameful childbirth—these were suspicions bred of the brothel and the servant quarter —not of the drawing-room.

Adrienne Kajetan's child! . . . Kajetan's and Elizabeth's. . . . No wonder she was so extraordinary. That voice, that poise, that uncanny understanding, intuition. It was blood and race and background speaking through her. And weren't love children always extraordinary? . . . Especially the love children of genius? . . . A love child! . . . *A love child!* . . . *A love child!*

Justine found herself beating her palms together as she repeated this litany of primitive envy. Kajetan—how she hated him! Could anything have matched his insolence, his self-satisfaction, his masculine triumph as he had stood there before her and silenced her with the truth! A party of disenchantment. How truly had last night's revelry been named.

She rose and went over and stood before the portrait of Elizabeth Sinclair. The lips curved an enigmatical smile at her. The whole face mocked her . . . made sport of her.

Justine seized the handle of her parasol firmly and hoisting it threateningly in mid-air she stood for an instant spellbound, inactive. Then with sudden vindictive decision she drew the parasol's metal tip destructively across Elizabeth Sinclair's face.

* * *

The physical expression of her rage purged Justine of every primitive feeling. She stood gazing stupidly at the horrid gash in Elizabeth Sinclair's portrait.

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What an inane thing to have done! . . . How could she possibly explain it? The question swept her back upon the firm sands of social expediency. She became cool, calm, poised, again. Her mind began to work with rapier precision. What a fool she had been to be upset by such a ridiculous story from Kajetan! . . . Obviously he had been playing for time. His tale was a desperate invention, a gesture such as a thief makes when he kicks over an apple-cart to divert attention. Her scorn had doubtless frightened him. He had sought to confuse her while he made good his escape. Doubtless he was already in full fight. But, she had to admit, that his impertinence had just fallen short of being magnificent. She would see to it that he would be properly thrashed. With Jed and Bud in the family, and Dustin Huntley still cherishing the memory of Elizabeth Sinclair with almost virginal austerity, there ought to be enough pugnacious material for a spectacular accounting. She wished dueling hadn't gone out. How delightful to shoot a dog like Kajetan down at fifty paces! Yet, a good pommeling was more humiliating.

She decided to go at once and rout Jed out. If Kajetan had fled there was still a chance of catching up with him and giving him his due. She turned sharply from the disfigured portrait and with a swift, decisive movement floated out of the room, up the stairs, and, in another instant, was beating a quick tattoo upon her husband's door; beating a quick tattoo and wondering in a vague, inconsequential way whether she had not caught a glimpse of a skirt swishing down the lower corridor.

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Jed roused thickly. "What the h——" he was beginning to demand, until he saw Justine's face.

She tried to be calm, to tell her story coolly, but before she had finished her voice had risen upon a note of high excitement.

"Don't yell so—*please!*" Jed admonished, holding his head between his hands.

She felt ridiculous. The whole thing was falling flat.

"Well?" she demanded in exasperation.

"You mean, am I going to thrash him? . . ." His speech was a little halting, but perfectly logical, coherent. "Hardly. You aren't looking for publicity, I hope. . . . Besides, a man doesn't lie so convincingly just on impulse."

"Don't tell me you believe such a ridiculous story!"

"Scarcely. . . . But I want a better reason than you give. . . . Kajetan is neither a fool nor a coward. . . . I have an idea he could give me a pretty good brush in a fist fight. Pounding the piano eight hours a day keeps a man's wrists and biceps developed just about as neatly as puttering around a golf course does."

"What's your theory, then?"

"Good Lord, Justine, you don't expect to hatch out a theory without incubation. . . . Besides, I never have theories. I leave that to my partner. . . . Have somebody fetch Dustin. He'll fix you up."

She kept her temper. It was useless to betray impatience. Wine made Jed at once genial and sharp-witted but it also made his humor brittle. Besides the suggestion appealed to her. She found one of the serv-

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ants stirring about the hall and turned him into a messenger.

Huntley came down in a plum-silk dressing-gown. He had a bottle of bromo-seltzer and aromatic spirits of ammonia in his hands, fancying some one was sick. These evidences of first-aid to inebriety tickled Jed into prolonged and senseless laughter.

Justine let her husband's wine-blown cackling lapse into chuckles. Then she repeated the story to Dustin. His face was a sickly gray when she had finished, but he said at once with quiet confidence:

"He's joined Selina Parsons in a conspiracy, that's all. Perhaps he's been in it all along. . . . These artists and their scorn of money! . . . Bah!"

"I told you Dustin would come through," Jed chortled. "Theories while you wait, eh, old top? . . . Not necessarily the correct theory. But what does that matter? . . . It will do the work. . . . And that's all that's necessary!"

Justine's lip curled. Yet she had a vague sense that Jed was right. *In vino veritas.* She looked sharply at Dustin. Did he believe his own theory? But the glance he threw back was dull and unenlightening. She decided not to probe further.

"What had we better do?" she asked. "What is our first move?"

Dustin answered. "Carry the war into the enemy's camp."

"You mean?"

"Get rid of Selina Parsons. . . . Tell her to go, at once."

* * *

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At the end of the interview Jed had said:

"Anything you and Dustin do is all right with me. . . . Only don't expect help. . . . I've other fish to fry. . . . Old Fosdick and I are putting our heads together. Watch us, that's all, watch us!"

Justine smiled at the importance of his manner. Besides his complete indifference to the other issue was reassuring. It made her decide it didn't amount to a row of pins—not really. Yet there was a vague feeling under the surface that she would have liked a more high-tempered reaction. In any case, Kajetan deserved a thrashing and it was a pity he wasn't going to get it, in spite of its inexpediency. But to have Jed lining up with old Fosdick was some compensation. She hoped it wouldn't be long before she could say to her friends:

"Jed Forsythe is one of the shrewdest men in the country. He's been years making the grade. But that's only because he has built so solidly. Because he's made no false moves."

Not that Jed needed justification—but it would be pleasant to have justification in stock whenever there seemed a demand for it.

In Dustin Huntley's and her hands. . . . Ordinarily she wouldn't have conceded too much judgment in a matter of this kind to Dustin. A little soft, a little yielding, a little undecisive the Dustin Huntley of her knowledge. But suddenly he glittered steely and sharp in the face of this emergency. A romantic soul faced with the complete smashing of his ideal. There could remain not a vestige of the tempered, well-bred philosophy of Dustin Huntley if the memory of Elizabeth Sinclair was to become submerged in nastiness. Jus-

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tine was shrewd enough to see that he was ready to throw everybody overboard to preserve his illusions—Selina, Kajetan, Adrienne—everybody! Pushed into a corner he would grow almost fanatical, stop at nothing. A knight-at-arms bent on chivalry. What if the lady of his heart were dead? . . . All the more reason to preserve the memory of her purity unspotted. Dustin Huntley would prove a good ally. Justine did not have to think twice to come to this conclusion.

* * *

Her brush with Selina came sooner than Justine had expected. The old woman was mounting to the veranda of the big house as Justine, determined to achieve a walk at all hazards, stepped out for a second time that morning into the hot sunshine.

"Good morning, Mrs. Forsythe," Selina said in a tone as respectful as one could wish for. "I'm sending Joe into Lakeview for some supplies. If I knew just how many guests to count on I could plan accordingly."

Was there ever a more competent overseer; a more disarming personality? But Selina's beady eyes snapping out a thousand restless conjectures, a thousand covert insolences, suddenly gave Justine her cue.

"Ah, of course, naturally. . . . Let me see." She stood there on the steps, counting upon her fingers. "At least twenty-five for dinner to-night . . . Ten, for luncheon, Monday . . . By Tuesday everybody gone."

"You—everybody—leaving Tuesday?"

"Yes. I intended to tell you this afternoon. . . . I

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think it might be well if you planned to go with us . . . on the same train, I mean. . . . Your home is in San Francisco, is it not?"

Selina drew back a trifle. "My home is at Laguna Vista," she answered quietly.

"It has been, you mean, Selina. . . . But it happens that I've quite decided to close the place up. . . . It's not worth the trouble and effort that's been expended on it."

Selina smiled shrewdly. "You can hardly close Laguna Vista up in four days, Mrs. Forsythe. Why, it would take six months to get rid of the livestock, alone."

"Nevertheless, I think it will be just as well if you left on Tuesday. . . . I have certain rights, you know."

"So have I, Mrs. Forsythe."

"Indeed. It would be interesting to hear them."

Selina breathed hard and a two-edged smile began further to sharpen her thin lips.

"It happens that your uncle, Washburn Sinclair, and I were brother and sister."

Upon the steps leading to the veranda of the big house! Without a single dramatic flourish! No wonder Justine Forsythe was dazed, benumbed.

Selina went into the house. Justine walked toward the lake. A nigger! . . . A filthy nigger! . . . Washburn Sinclair and Selina Parsons brother and sister!

Sinclair blood, her blood in Selina Parsons' veins! What a ridiculous thing life was!

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Chapter Twelve

ADRIENNE kept to a darkened room all day. A locked room, to be exact. She heard Selina moving about, tapping on her door, calling faintly then commandingly for her to open. Finally to quiet Selina Adrienne cried out:

"Please let me alone. . . . I'm just tired."

Her voice sounded remote, unnatural, as she let these words escape her. She was like a creature who had died and wakened again in a new, formless world. Formless, because it was so bright, so dazzling. Kajetan her father! and Elizabeth Sinclair her mother! What more could any daughter expect, wish for? . . . She was still under the lyric spell of her father's recital of his love story. An idyl, Kajetan had made of it. A thing infinitely romantic and poignant. Even his flight had taken on aspects of poetry. A young, impressionable artist, suddenly trembling in the presence of riches. What could he do but fly and preserve his artistic integrity? Not that he despised money. But money that was not the product of his genius: Ah, there was corruption and stagnation in that for ardent souls! . . . The first weeks he had drifted upon a sea of satisfied desire. It might have gone on forever, this drifting. He might have married Elizabeth Sinclair and played at tinkling tunes to while away the boredom that must have resulted inevitably from such a course. But he was wiser and fled. Any man, worthy the name, always had a touch of Ulysses, the wanderer

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in him. It is Penelope's fate to stay at home and spin. To bear children alone. Adrienne had winced at this—there was something so ruthless and brutal in Kajetan's calm statement of his creed. But was this an abstract, an impersonal, philosophy? In other words, had Kajetan guessed the consequences of those weeks of dalliance? . . . Had he suspected the coming of a child? He protested that such a thing had never entered his head. But Adrienne wondered. He would have gone in any case, he hastened to add. "An artist is not to be bound with chains. . . ." Adrienne thought: "They tell me I am to be an artist. Must I break every chain . . . every chain, however lovely? . . . Every golden chain?" Bud came to mind. A passionate gust swept her. No, she'd let them bind her, strong and fast and past all breaking. *Them?* She meant Bud, of course. . . . Had her mother felt this same way about Kajetan? If Adrienne had not already forgiven Elizabeth she would have forgiven her, then, at that moment when the soft outline of Bud swept down upon her consciousness like a mist flamed by sunrise. Perhaps women were never meant to be artists, were never meant to be creators of anything but life.

But if Kajetan put glamour into his recital of the undoing of Elizabeth Sinclair, what charm and tenderness and delicacy went into the tale of how he found his daughter. . . . The first almost impalpable flutterings like winged things in the dark. Then dim flashes, with the fluttering things taking brief form, outline. Finally the blinding light of truth—making everything clear, poignant, irrevocable. These three stages illustrated by the first meeting when he had played while she

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sang. Again when Selina had said before the entire roomful of people: "Yes . . . at Laguna Vista, seventeen years ago, lacking a week!" . . . And decisively, when she had trailed across the lawn in the ivory-satin trappings of Elizabeth Sinclair. At that moment all doubt was dispelled. "I knew then you were my daughter!" Every extravagance of Kajetan's speech and gesture obliterated by the tremendous simplicity of this final statement.

And when would he claim her before everybody, before the whole world? She did not have to give this question voice. Mysteriously, silently it was communicated to him. He raised it himself, a trace of sadness in his tone; answering it, inconclusively, with another question. What move would be the most expedient? Already she hated that word, felt a sudden chill fall over her precipitant happiness.

But the shadow passed before the magic of his words, again vigorous and warm, and this time touched with suave mystery. He was in America on a stupendous mission. At present his hapless country writhed under the compulsion of bearing arms for her ancient enemy, Austria. But the day must come when, crushed and torn and bleeding, she would see that the moment had come to strike off her chains. He was here to provide against that moment. To raise funds, in other words, pledges against the day of freedom. In that day it would be money that would count—above everything else—money. It was a holy mission—holy and secret and full of pitfalls. A thing to go about cautiously, averting suspicions, making covert friends, toiling step by step. The slightest mischance might wreck

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everything. . . . Therefore, if an inexpedient move were made—

Could he trust her to understand? . . . Did she realize the importance of a sure and cautious advance? He would try to put it delicately. But scandals . . . sensations . . . at such a time these things were awkward, pregnant with publicity. A man on a secret mission must avoid publicity, above all things, of a questionable character. Publicity for Kajetan, the world-famous pianist, was one thing. If it did nothing else it threw the public off guard. But publicity which raised a question of morals—that would be unfortunate. In America of all places, America which legalized immorality but would have none of it indulged boldly, frankly. . . . For instance, a man might have ten divorces and as many wives. But one mistress and he was quite done for! . . . Was he shocking her? . . . Dear child, he was dealing in words—which meant nothing. Actions went deeper than labels, classifications. To love sublimely—that was a matter between a man and his gods. But language, the legal code, the lexicon of morals, it had no finer shadings, it did not go below the surface, it did not realize that there were as many variations to personal relationships as there were people; it did not realize that every case was special, that there were not, that there never could be, generalizations in such matters.

Did she understand it all that morning? . . . Dimly, as she understood drifting clouds. She knew that they cast shadows and passed on. Why, for the moment, it was not pertinent to inquire. Besides, were not the clouds swallowed up in the warmth of the man pleading

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his cause? Her father, upon a secret mission—a holy mission. And what was he saying: "Would you not rather be the daughter of a statesman of Europe than of a spy, a secret agent, dangling before his time upon a tree of shame?" Instantly she had seen bayonets drawn up in a line of menacing straightness, glistening in the sun.

She put her hands before her eyes, shivering.

And what had Kajetan, what had her father, said then?

"You will be the daughter of a prime minister. At the proper time, in the proper manner. When it is expedient. . . . You must not fear that word, Adrienne. It is a word that has moved mountains. Yes, my child, next to faith, expediency is the greatest word in the language. . . ." How did he know that the word expediency had cast a shadow?

The line of bayonets still glistening but held at attention, long avenues of them, in homage . . .

"The daughter of a prime minister!"

It was then that the sun had pushed its way like a squeezed orange up through the mists that veiled the lake.

"See, it is morning!"

How fair the first moments of dawn are!

* * *

So the tale had run in the radiance of early morning, under the spell of Kajetan's personality. . . . In a shaded room at mid-day it cooled, fell off a trifle. There were little undercurrents of distrust moving beneath the bright surface. Elizabeth Sinclair bearing

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her child alone. Who had been with her? So many snarled threads to untangle. The questions that she would have to put to Selina! She wanted to hear, to know everything, and yet there were moments when she feared the truth. Kajetan's voice swayed you as Kajetan's playing did. She remembered how she had once characterized his power. Above the composition he interpreted—giving it any interpretation he chose, making a mazurka restful, a cradle song disturbing. You were in his hands. A thing that went deeper than technique. It was the man himself and his brutal power. Even his gentleness, his tenderness, was vigorous with leashed strengths. What a father to have! All the doubts, the fears, the mistrusts, submerged in just the fact of him. Her mother pushed instantly into a gray, uncertain background.

In the end everything was confusion. Muddled, hopelessly, muddled. It was then she fell asleep.

* * *

The next evening at the supper table. Just Adrienne and Selina, alone. Why was it that neither of them had stirred from the cottage? . . . Were they expected at the big house—Selina to preside in her full-skirted silk dress over the serving of dinner, Adrienne as the charming ingenue of the party? What kept Selina indoors? Why did no one look them up, send for them? . . . Where was Bud? Adrienne turned all these things over in her mind. But she asked no questions. An unbridgable gulf seemed to separate her from Selina . . .

For the first time in weeks the two sat together at

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the evening meal. It was like turning back the pages upon a dull book. Would it be possible to take up this life again—life at Laguna Vista with its placid monotony—after the rest had gone home? . . . Was she forgetting her changed estate? The daughter of Kajetan to be buried again, like an unwelcome corpse inadvertently dug up? . . . What a ghastly idea! . . . Expediency . . . expediency . . . A silly word . . . What was Selina turning over in her mind? . . . A fathomless mind . . . Great, green forests, that had no open spaces, through which the sun could never filter . . . Idols that raised hideous faces in the moonlight and devoured children . . . Curious birds, scarlet and gold and silver, flying from limb to limb . . . Animals with great tails swinging from the trees.

At last Selina cleared her throat, digging down into the folds of her skirt for a note, a letter.

"Kajetan brought this, while you were sleeping."

Adrienne withheld her hand for a moment. Selina rattled the envelope impatiently. Adrienne took it.

DEAREST CHILD:

Circumstances compelled me to tell Mrs. Forsythe. It was unfortunate. Premature disclosures always are. This means I cannot stay on. . . . You will be discreet, I am sure. Mark time.

Write me. I shall be in San Francisco at the Fairmont Hotel for at least a fortnight. Au revoir, my child, my daughter.

KAJETAN.

Premature disclosures . . . No wonder Justine Forsythe had not sent for her. She felt cold, aban-

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doned. . . . Kajetan, her father, could leave, thus, with a few chill phrases. Selina was looking at her. Adrienne said with a note of bitter arrogance:

"You've read this, of course."

Selina's eyes drew up in a shrewd chuckle. "Naturally. . . . You see the sort of man your father is."

Adrienne wanted to ask if anything save the letter had passed between them. But pride kept this question back. Instead she answered: "We understand each other."

Selina ignored Adrienne's haughtiness. "You'd better not count on him, that's all. . . . The Sinclair millions are what we're going after. . . . Mighty good fun—ripping open the sack. . . . Lordy, Lordy, how that Justine person is gwine to holler!"

Adrienne stared. Selina suddenly genial again, chuckling over plunder. Adrienne got the feel of her words without quite the sense of them. "Don't you understand, honey-child, every penny belongs to you. This place—the San Francisco house—stocks, bonds, money in the bank—millions of dollars of it—all yours, all yours."

It turned Adrienne sick somehow. She said quietly, though her heart was pounding:

"Don't be silly. . . . I don't want any of it. Not a penny. My father will look after me!"

The daughter of a prime minister. If Selina knew!

"Don't be silly yourself! . . . What's he ever done for you? . . . He's one of those run-out-on-you men. Don't I know them? Say, honey-child, the world is full of them. They're all alike."

It was no use. She couldn't keep up the fight. Selina

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did something to her spirit. Selina with a bludgeon of cynicism. Besides, she wanted Selina's story. After all, she couldn't expect the complete truth from a man. She said:

"It's time to tell me about my mother. . . . I want to know how she died."

Selina brewed the tea. Adrienne waited for the up-tilting saucer. In the twilight—the story of how her mother had died. . . . Presently Selina began.

* * *

In her room again with the door locked, bolted. . . . Possessed of a strange, new horror. That was the word, horror. As if she stood upon the threshold of that great, green forest that had no open spaces . . . idols . . . moonlight . . . devouring children. . . .

Selina . . . the same blood in their veins! She was not indignant like Justine, just filled with terror. To sleep under the same roof with this woman, this black woman . . . how could she? how could she? . . . What made the difference? Something dim, racial, beyond her control, speaking within her.

Elizabeth had never known. Selina had never told Elizabeth that the same blood ran in their veins. Why? . . . Could Elizabeth Sinclair have gone to this black kin with her secret if she had known? . . . Adrienne doubted it. You could suffer an inferior until he was bound to you with ties of blood.

How her mother had died. What a story! . . . What a story! Where was the glamour? the romantic wooing? . . . Need Selina have made it all so ugly, so hard, so cruel? . . . The entire Sinclair fortune

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hers. Selina would help her fight for it. Selina said: "Your mother's idea was silly. She should have left it all to you right off. What does a name matter? You'll cover all that up with dollars. You'll buy your social position. Don't I know? . . . I've seen it done thousands of times. . . . Your mother had a sick idea, that's all. But you can't talk Sinclairs down once they set their heart on a thing. I'm the same way . . . Sinclair blood, honey-child! Sinclair blood!"

How Selina rolled the fact of their kinship under her tongue—like a starved creature made bold. Under cover no more—a she-wolf, snarling in the underbrush. But a she-wolf made suddenly reckless, impudent, licking her chops, half mad with the prospects of the feast before her.

Adrienne had wanted to strike her. To call her nigger.

Where was Bud? . . . Why didn't Bud come to her? . . . She lay upon her bed, crouching. . . .

Selina was retiring. Adrienne heard her turning the lock of her bedroom door. She lay still for some moments. Then she rose and slipped out into the night. Never, again, under the same roof with this black kinswoman. She would die first.

* * *

The night and peace. The lake, lapping the shore softly, mirroring a faint star-light. The wind coming fitfully. North winds always lasted three days. A curious hot chill in the air Yes, cold and hot in turns, as a person in the presence of a great disaster. The big house silent. Only a light or two in an upper window.

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The canopy of silver and blue, gone, vanished. Was it two nights ago that she was seventeen? . . . Two nights . . . eternity. "You will never be seventeen again!" Never again! . . . That was the inexorable thing about life. Gone the "Tassels-on-my-boots" days . . . gone the days of gilded oak leaves and Christmas gayety . . . gone the days at the Exposition . . . gone the day when we were seventeen. . . . Gone, forever . . . past all recall. . . . Where was Bud? Why didn't Bud come? . . . Oh, the ache of that! The ache of wondering!

Adrienne went down and sat before the lake on a little rise of sand hedged in with willows. She liked the cool smell of willows. A plaintive, mournful hum was in the air, an incipient wail. Here the wind was shut out. But she knew the sound. It was not the wind. It was the composite voice of a million gnats wailing for a flame at which to consume themselves. Toward the end of summer, every afternoon when the sun's rays began to slant, they would begin. A weird, incredible sound like the cry of a lost soul. At night, when the lamps were lit, the chimneys would be choked with their dead bodies. Wailing for a bright flame . . . death! Adrienne shivered.

She caught a stir among the willow trees . . . the flash of a white skirt. It was Jane Witherspoon. She came and sat beside Adrienne, silently. . . . This was good—silent companionship. For an hour they sat together looking out at the lake ruffling like a black pall in the wind, new sprung and vindictive, leaping even over the willow thicket—blowing the plaintive gnats away. Finally Jane Witherspoon spoke.

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"Don't fight them. . . . It isn't worth it. . . . I fought and won thirty years ago. . . . Won money. My picture was in every newspaper. My mother's . . . A million dollars—that was what I won. But in the end, I had no name. . . . I had no friends. . . . I have no friends, now. People tolerate me because they want somebody to patronize."

Adrienne said nothing.

"Somebody will urge you that times have changed . . . somebody will say that *you*—what you are—is all that counts. Don't believe them. . . . The mob hates our kind. . . . Stand firm. Scrub floors . . . dig in the fields . . . walk the streets. But don't compromise. Keep the secret of your birth to yourself."

Still Adrienne said nothing. She was wondering: "How does she know? . . . Are they talking freely at the big house already?" And she felt her cheeks burning. Had Jane Witherspoon's cheeks been burning for thirty years?

"Don't be afraid, I shall never tell a soul! . . . I heard, quite by accident, Justine and Kajetan talking yesterday morning. . . . But, I knew—I felt something, from the very first."

Quite suddenly, without warning, Adrienne began to cry. Without effort, in a steady stream the tears rushed out and fell on her hands clasped tightly on her breast.

Jane said gently: "Let me take you back. . . . Don't you want to go home?"

For the first time Adrienne spoke between sobs.

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"No—never again. Never under the same roof . . ."

Presently she was calmer. Jane took a silk sweater she was carrying and made a pillow of it.

"Lie down here," she urged.

Adrienne put her head in the sweater's plump surface and slept. . . . Jane Witherspoon sat guarding her.

* * *

The wind grew hotter, fiercer, more ominous. Still Adrienne slept. At dawn Jane roused her.

"I'll go eat breakfast with the men," Adrienne said.

They were standing before the Big House. Adrienne wanted to thank Jane, to say: "I shan't fight them. You are right, it isn't worth it." But, instead, she pressed the elder woman's hands impulsively and was gone. Her way led back toward the meadow, among the hired men's bunk-houses and mess-room. She went into the mess-room. Joe and Ferguson and Felix and Carlborg were fiercely devouring rations. A Filipino mess-boy was waiting on them. They all raised their eyes as if at an apparition. Never in her entire life at Laguna Vista had she ever entered the men's quarters. Quite suddenly the explanation for her presence flashed through Adrienne's mind.

"I'm going away. I came to say good-by." They stared dully. "To say good-by and have my breakfast with you. . . . My last breakfast at Laguna Vista."

Carlborg sprang up and made a place for her. The Filipino began to bring a plate and fork and spoons in a sort of dazed wonder. Would she have mush and

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eggs and beans and hot-cakes and coffee? . . . In spite of her mood she had to laugh. Just a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. Bread? . . . They had rolls, hot rolls. . . . Hot rolls, then. The coffee was in a thick cup, black and bitter, tempered slightly by yellow cream. She took her rolls plain, fearful of the quality of the butter. The men were embarrassed and shy. Adrienne felt that she was spoiling their meal. She sipped her bitter coffee reflectively. Her last breakfast at Laguna Vista. Where was she going? . . . What were her plans? She had no money—nothing. Yet she knew that she was leaving—that she must leave.

Presently Ferguson spoke. Was she leaving them to be married? A simple, direct question.

"Married!" Her exclamation was half interrogation as if she were putting the matter up to herself. But she said no more. . . . Yet Ferguson's question stood poised before her all through the meal. "Married?" It was the first time she had ever thought of such a thing. Bud? . . . Had she ever thought of Bud and marriage? . . . Didn't she love him? . . . And wasn't marriage inevitable, when two people loved? . . . Her mother—ah, well, that was a different case. Her mother had loved Dustin Huntley. . . . She had Selina's word for that. Then why . . . Why hadn't Elizabeth married Dustin Huntley? Because he was shy . . . afraid of her fortune? . . . How silly! . . . Why not have said right out: "We love each other. . . . Don't let money stand in our way of happiness." That's what Elizabeth should have said. People were so silly, so incredibly silly. Not to be frank about things that touched your happiness. What

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nonsense! Only, if Elizabeth had married Dustin Huntley, where would Adrienne have been? . . . Half of somebody else . . . That day on the hillside . . . talking to Bud about just such an absurd speculation . . . The question went round and round and round. Yourself . . . half of somebody else . . . nobody! Nobody . . . never to have existed at all. But that wasn't possible. The only possible thing was the thing that happened. If it didn't happen it wasn't possible. . . . That's what fate was—the thing that happened. The thing that happened because it *had* happened. You couldn't get around it, some way. If it was there, it was meant to be—that was all.

But Elizabeth must have loved Kajetan too. It was inconceivable that Elizabeth Sinclair could have—Then, one could love again. Twice, three times, how many . . . ? Was there only one real—were the others just shams? . . . How did one know which was the real and which the sham? . . . Take Bud, for instance. Real or sham, real or sham . . . Suppose Elizabeth had married Dustin Huntley. Would she always have loved him? . . . To-day, for instance. Huntley was faintly ridiculous to Adrienne, now—to-day. Would he have been different if Elizabeth had married him? Or would he always have been faintly ridiculous? . . . But, there you were again. How could he ever have been anything else, seeing he was what he was?

Her mother must have loved Kajetan. . . . Kajetan wasn't ridiculous now. Sure of himself . . . Yet he had been afraid of money, too. In a different way

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om Dustin Huntley. But fear hadn't routed him mpletely. He'd had his way in spite of it. He didn't :actly fear money, he scorned it.

She hadn't seen Bud for two days. . . . Suppose ud had failed her. . . . Would she fall in love with mebody else, as her mother had? Did you love a :rson or did you love love? The ache again . . . the :he of Bud not coming!

She would have to go back to the cottage—once. n the daylight it would not be so bad. To pack some nings together. Pack? But where was she going?

Ferguson was persistent. He wanted to know vhether or not she was to be married.

"Married?" She toyed again with the question. 'Maybe . . . perhaps . . . I don't know."

The four men smiled. Then, Felix the Basque, said quite simply:

"How did you like our presents?"

Presents. Of course they had brought her presents on her seventeenth birthday. Years ago. She hadn't opened a single package. A whole basketful. She never would open them. But she said smilingly:

"Oh, they were lovely. . . . You can't imagine!"

She had felt that way, years ago, when she was seventeen. Such things touched her then. But now—*now!* . . . This minute. Suddenly she realized eternity. Swiftly, in a flash. A fragmentary thing that passed.

She must go back to the cottage and pack her things into a grip. . . . This was her last day at Laguna Vista.

Would she have been leaving Laguna Vista if—there

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she went again speculating, raising questions. If. But there was really no such thing as if. The only possible thing was the thing that had happened.

* * *

Selina was waiting for her when she entered the cottage.

"So there you-all are! . . . What you mean, staying out all night? You better watch your step, miss."

Adrienne passed Selina with contemptuous hauteur. The old, faintly chocolate face frightened her. But instinct warned against betraying fear. She closed the door of her room and locked it. She must pack a few things together. What things? The presents she was never to open stood over by the window—a whole basketful of them. For a moment she had an indecision. Perhaps she ought to look. But almost before she raised the question a complete indifference claimed her. No, not so much indifference, as a revulsion against projecting anything that was a part of her old life into this new adventure.

New adventure. It was something like the adventure she had imagined as a child. Being locked out and told to wander over the face of the earth without home or fireside—visiting cities and palaces and moated castles. And, in the end, curing a king's son with some convenient magic and living happily as his bride ever after. . . . In fairy stories one was always a bride—forever. Time, procreation, pain, shadow—everything unpleasant, postponed indefinitely. And so they were married and lived happily ever after. Not just until death came. But ever after. Forever and ever in other

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ords. A bride . . . deathless love . . . ever after, er after . . . Bud . . . marriage . . . She must ack her things and leave. . . . On an adventure. The dventure of her life.

Then, quite suddenly, all this fragmentary, disjointed peculation cleared. She knew at once where she was oing. To her father, of course. How stupid not to ave thought of her father before. She looked up his ote again. *At the Fairmont Hotel for at least a fortight . . . my dear child, my daughter.* When he eard how inevitable everything had become he would vant her with him. Kajetan wouldn't want her under he roof with a black woman claiming kinship. From his moment her preparations were logical, methodical. She knew just what to take, what to leave behind. She packed slowly, considering everything with a judicial eye. It was one thing to go off adventuring in fairy-tale fashion. Quite another, to plan on joining your father.

But in the midst of it all Bud's voice at the front door . . . Bud's step down the narrow corridor . . . Bud's knock for admission. Happily, ever after . . . for ever and ever. The adventure achieved without faring forth. . . . He had come for her, hadn't he? . . . Then it must be so. . . . Joining her father? . . . What nonsense?

"Come in!"

"Packing! . . . What's the big idea?"

He should have taken her in his arms. Ah, later on the hillside . . . in his arms on the hillside.

He had come to go with her for a walk. . . . Walk! Of course. One wanted the whole universe for these

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moments which were to mean so much. Not four stuffy walls.

Happily . . . ever after. For ever and ever.

* * *

The wind had a vicious, ominous quality. The sun was darkened by it, or by the haze, to be more exact, that the wind had achieved. A sand-colored haze made up of fine, imperceptible dust. The lake was lashed to a muddy fury, the trees were bent and harried. Words, forming upon the lips, were caught by it and whirled through space.

Bud and Adrienne toiled up—up. Silently. Until they reached a grove of oak trees. Here the wind broke into a thousand eddies, shattered for a moment by the stubborn column of trees.

"Let's stay here," commanded Bud, throwing himself upon the ground.

Ah, he didn't intend taking her in his arms! Adrienne sat also, crouched.

"Well, what's the big idea?"

Adrienne stared at him. He was rolling a cigarette with his cool, shapely fingers. Clean and cool with little patches of sun-bleached hair just below the knuckles. It was these hands, these fingers, that had given the first impression of him on that first day at the Exposition. Yearning for the clasp of those hands. Why were hands, fingers, such poignant things? Why did her eyes so avidly devour the little patches of sun-bleached hair below the knuckles?

Like a certain picture at the big house. The same dull-red hair, the same deep-blue eyes. His great-

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grandfather Howard—the unsuccessful gambler all over again. Ah, but gamblers took risks—that's what Adrienne liked about them. . . . With other people's capital, Fräulein. Karl's words coming back. Karl of all people.

"What's the big idea?" Bud repeated again, with a surly note. He didn't look like a gambler when he said that. What he looked like was a bandit, a man upon the cross-roads with a leveled revolver.

She brought her hand instinctively to her heart—her heart at which he was aiming so ruthlessly. "Big idea?" she echoed foolishly. "I don't know what you mean."

In spite of the wind he lit his cigarette swiftly with the competence of a potential mariner. The blackened match sped from his fingers. Adrienne watched it disappear in the dry grass and she thought: "He shouldn't be smoking. . . . He shouldn't be throwing dead matches about." Fancy, thinking that when a bandit opposite you was aiming at your heart!

"I mean, how does this bird Kajetan get the way he does? . . . And that nigger—she's in this, too, up to her neck. You know that they are lying. . . . You must know!"

He struck another match and she watched him with incredible fascination, her hand still on her heart, her mind still on the triviality of the flaring matches and the dry grass. It was as if she was thrusting the first thing that came to hand between her hopes and the reality.

"Trying to shake the old family tree for a roll of coin, eh! Well, they'll both get fat waiting for us to

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come through. . . . I said to mater: 'Get Adrienne away and smoke them out. Adrienne isn't in the combination. She's too smart to pull a line like that. She knows which side her bread is buttered. Make it worth her while and watch her smoke.' "

Get Adrienne away . . . make it worth her while. Give her money . . . give her a party . . . give her a ring for her finger . . . a jewel for her hair. . . . Give her anything but a father and mother. Take her father away. Take her mother away. She won't mind. She knows which side her bread is buttered. . . . He ought not to be smoking. He ought not to be throwing matches into the dry grass. . . . Between her hopes and the reality—the first thing that came to hand.

It wasn't that he was skeptical. It wasn't that he was on the defensive—his fortune threatened. Adrienne understood that. But he was so cock-sure, so brutal, so belittling. *Adrienne is too smart to pull a line like that. She knows which side her bread is buttered.* Ugh! . . . How could he! . . .

Take your hand from your heart. It isn't any protection. His shafts go clean through. . . . And, yet, his eyes still verge on violet, his hands are still clean and cool, the little patches of sun-bleached hair are still just below the knuckles. Is this all there is? . . . Is this all there ever was? Beauty of form and line and limb. Like a pencil sketch without breadth and substance? Can one fall in love with a pencil sketch? If he were to touch her now, tenderly, would his shafts matter? Would his emptiness matter? . . . Love can be poured into an empty pitcher. Ten million dollars.

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How heavy are ten million dollars? Heavy enough. Ah, the things ten million dollars could crush out!

She spoke finally. "You are mistaken. Kajetan is my father. Elizabeth Sinclair my mother. Nothing will make me deny that."

He leaped to his feet, hurling the cigarette stub into the wind. Instantly a puff, a flame.

"You've done it, now!" she cried. "You've set fire to the hillside."

The blaze rose, swept downward, hurtling before the wind's breath.

"Good God!" he said stupidly. "Good God!"

He whipped off his coat and ran forward. She stood transfixed, watching him attempting to beat out, attempting to confine, the flames. But they ran with crackling laughter from him, leaping high in their ecstasy, mad things suddenly loosed, terrible in their rapture.

In five minutes the whole hillside was an inferno. Adrienne fell back, calling to Bud to come away to save himself. He signaled her to mount higher, out of the wind's path. Then she saw him poised as if for flight and run headlong into the blaze. For a moment she was transfixed with horror. His act seemed insane, futile. Then she understood: He was leaping through the flames in an effort to beat them to Laguna Vista.

Unless the wind veered she was comparatively safe. She crawled up to a high ridge. The immediate foreground was veiled in smoke, chaotic. But, a little to the east, on the other side of the lake, she caught a glimpse of the huddle of buildings at Denton's. It

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would be a long pull, swinging east and south and west to make the half circle to absolute safety. But anything was better than standing still. She wondered whether Stanley Denton had closed the place up and left for San Francisco.

* * *

Adrienne reached Dentons' shortly after noon. Stanley had not left for San Francisco. She found him still asleep on the decrepit red sofa in the front room, an empty wine demijohn on the floor. He had been drinking. But the thickness of his wits cleared at the sight of the pall of smoke on the opposite shore and a sense of community duty had him in an instant grip.

"I'll have to go over and help them fight it," he said. "You'd better stay here. It's a rotten hole but it's safe."

He started up the sputtering engine of a leaky old launch and speeded away. She stood and watched until the smoke devoured him in a quick, murky gulp. Then she went back to the house. A sudden exhaustion seized her. She threw herself on the red sofa and slept. . . .

She was awakened by heavy tramping along the shallow porch. It was midnight. Stanley Denton had come back. He lit a candle. Laguna Vista was gone, swept clean. The fire had burned to the water's edge.

Everybody was safe though Bud had a nasty burn on his hand and his hair had been singed in his leap into the flames. He had run with incredible speed all the way back to Laguna Vista and managed to warn them in time to save the live-stock.

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"A game guy!" was Stanley's terse estimate of Bud.

Adrienne stirred herself and made Stanley coffee. It was his turn to sleep.

She sat until dawn upon the lake shore wide eyed and wakeful. . . . Laguna Vista gone. The cottage, the big house, the fig grove, Karl's gardens, gone! Burned up by a cigarette stub thrown in a moment of anger. A trivial thing. Did all the significant moments of life hinge upon trivialities? Destruction in the wake of a tiny spark.

"A game guy!"

She was glad that Bud could have his moments. He had failed *her*. But he was a game guy in quite another scratch. Laguna Vista gone. . . . She would have to go to her father, now.

* * *

At noon that day she heard the whirr of a motor. Stanley was still sleeping. She ran out into the jagged road and waited. A huge Pierce-Arrow car swung into sight. Carter Fosdick was its only occupant.

"I've come for you," he announced. "I'm to drive you down to San Francisco."

She decided not to wake Stanley. She climbed into the front seat. The back of the car was filled with all sorts of miscellaneous luggage.

"We managed to save this much," he explained. "But not a scrap more."

Everybody had been taken into Lakeview and were going down to the city on the afternoon train. Fosdick treated the whole thing as a joke—an incredible lark. Selina had sent Adrienne a coat she had rescued.

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Beyond that Adrienne possessed only the clothes on her back. She didn't even have a hat.

At first the talk turned entirely on fires. The menace of the long rainless summer in California with everything dried to tinder. The Chicago fire, the San Francisco fire started by an earthquake. Adrienne talked, made conversation but back in her head she kept wondering: "Why did they send Fosdick for me? . . . Where is he to take me? . . . What about Bud?"

Presently Carter Fosdick said: "It would be interesting to know how this fire started."

Bud hadn't told. Could it be possible? She answered quietly: "It was started by a cigarette stub."

He looked at her shrewdly. "Oh!"

She couldn't help thinking: "How indirect people are. We all say what we mean as obscurely as possible."

They were silent for some moments. Then she said: "When are you going back east, Mr. Fosdick?"

"Not for several months. My father wants me to stay here and play around the stock market a bit."

"Here? . . . I thought from what I heard people say that New York was the ideal place for that."

He laughed. "You're right, it is. But the guvenor wants me to play my own game. As far from his reach as possible. If I were right on Wall Street with him he'd be advising in spite of himself. . . . What he means to do is try me out. I'll probably disappoint him."

"You don't like business?"

"I'm not sure. . . . Some people are born to their

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careers. Others achieve them. . . . You, of course, are to be a singer."

"Perhaps . . . Whatever my father advises." The color came into her face as she said this and she was annoyed. "You see, I have a father, too."

She felt that it had been badly, clumsily, done. But she wanted to find out just how much he knew—just how much they had been talking.

The directness of his answer took her breath away. "They don't believe it, do they?"

"You mean Bud doesn't."

"Well, he reflects the family."

"Do *you* believe it?"

He smiled deeply, mysteriously. "The wine-dark strain," was all he said.

She felt as if some one had opened a window to a grateful breeze. He believed it. One person believed it. That was something. A grateful breeze blowing upon her.

A little farther on he said quite simply:

"The family wanted me to sound you out. . . . You don't mind, I hope. After all, there are questions to settle. And, I daresay it's easier for two strangers to approach a delicate subject than the people really concerned. . . . I think they're fair minded—as fair minded as folks can be under the circumstances. . . . You understand their position, I'm sure."

She felt calm and competent. "Perfectly. They don't want to part with their ten million dollars. . . . I can't see where they got the idea that I wanted a penny of it."

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"They'll give you an income—a very generous one, for life. . . . Considering the fact that they think your claim isn't precisely valid I should say that was doing pretty well."

She decided not to be indignant. "But, don't you see," she answered quietly, "can't you see, either it's all mine or it isn't?"

He turned those disturbing eyes upon her. "If it's all yours why don't you—"

She put out her hand. "What do I care?"

"I knew that's what you'd say. . . . I told Bud that."

She gave a dry laugh. "He didn't believe it—did he? . . . I once was foolish enough to think he had a dash of gambler's blood in him. I thought he'd take a chance."

"Gamblers don't always take chances. If the hand they hold doesn't look good to them they throw it away."

He was looking straight ahead when he said this. And she felt grateful. To have turned his eyes upon her, then, would have been more than she could have borne.

* * *

For the first time in three days Adrienne felt a sudden lightness of heart, as if by a few simple words she had cut herself free of entanglements and could soar aloft. Laguna Vista, Selina, the Forsythes—free, free of them all! Speeding toward an unknown future. Was it these things that gave her this sense of happy release? Or was it the shadowy understanding of her

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companion. He threw a cool shade, somehow, upon her turmoil. She felt in him a strange, a curious refreshment. An enticing pool. Her first real impression of him came back to her. To plunge boldly into an enticing pool. What did it mean, this imagery?

They were riding through a foothill country now, sprinkled with firs and pine trees. They had left the smoke-clouded lake region behind. The wind had died. It was a day warm enough to make the breeze formed by the rapidly moving car a delight. . . . Presently they were swinging into the Sonoma Valley. Prune orchards, vineyards, hop-fields, wineries. A rich, brooding country. Adrienne had passed through it before on the train, but she was struck afresh with its opulence, its charm. Brown hills, green streams of verdure near the water courses. Redwood trees by the winding river. Vines in undulating rows marching up the hillsides, heavy with grapes within a few weeks of harvest. Peace, calm. What had become of the turmoil of yesterday?

At her side, with a slender, competent hand upon the wheel, a shadowy companion. Making a cool pattern upon her consciousness. . . . An enticing pool . . . Throwing a shade . . . an enticing pool. How ridiculous. Pools didn't throw a shade. Pools didn't make a cool pattern. . . . A tree, then, green with leafage. Through which the sun filtered. You felt the sun's warmth pleasantly strained through heavy boughs. . . . But, a pool too, into which one might plunge, boldly. Boldly. Not just wetting one's toes as at a fountain rim. But surrendering everything.

* * *

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They stopped for dinner at a little Italian Inn and had the table spread under a grape arbor. Mission grapes hung down in purple clusters which the slanting sun turned into glazed fire. Anchovies and salami and crisp bread upon the thick plates and red wine in fat goblets. Rissoto and a veal stew flavored deftly with rosemary. And at the end a great platter heaped with pears and a cream cheese and black, bitter coffee. Adrienne ate everything.

When the pears came on she wasn't sure whether she wanted anything more. But Fosdick said:

"Fresh pears and cheese . . . In the North of Italy the pears and cheese are a tradition. You take a bite of one and then a bite of the other. It's ravishing."

She watched him pare the fruit and cut it into quarters. When he passed it to her their hands touched. The tips of his fingers were like fire. She felt a shock, a surprise. She had expected his hands to be cool. He read her thoughts and leaning forward he said simply:

"I'm in love with you." Something sharp and poignant passed through her. "I'll marry you to-morrow if you say so!"

A pool into which one might plunge, boldly. Yet the depths frightened her. She answered. "I wouldn't be sure enough to marry anybody now. I don't know yet what it's all about. . . ."

He was beating a quick tattoo upon the table with his fingers. She thought. "That isn't what I mean, at all. Why can't I put what I mean into words?" She knew that he was brooding over a reply. It came finally as he plunged a knife into the pear on his plate. He said, "I'd take you on any terms."

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He wanted her bad enough to marry her but he wouldn't insist on it. Any risk, any concession, any price to have her. Were men all like this? Did men ever count the cost? She wanted to say so many things and yet all that escaped her lips was:

"You forget, I'm going to my father."

Why did she say this? . . . Was she frightened, deep down? He was biting into his pear with sharp white teeth. She saw the full redness of his lips in a blur—the immaculate slenderness of his body, his black hair touched with grape-purple like the clustering fruit hanging below the trellis. Beauty of form and line and limb. Was all youth beautiful? Was all youth made for love? Did it matter whose feet pressed out the wine of life if it but flowed? And, suddenly, mysteriously, Adrienne felt the yearning pathos of untrodden vintages.

* * *

The clerk behind the desk said to her: "Kajetan? . . . Oh, he left last night. . . . No, he didn't leave any address." He leaned forward confidentially. "A quick getaway—like that!" He snapped his fingers.

She felt a little sick. The daughter of a prime minister . . . the daughter of a spy . . . bayonets drawn up in a line of menacing straightness glistening in the sun. . . .

Outside, Carter Fosdick was waiting. . . . How did one know which was real and which was sham? Her mother had loved Dustin Huntley. And yet when Kajetan came—

Outside Carter Fosdick was waiting—waiting to

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take her on any terms. Marry her to-morrow if she wished it. Or—was it usual for a man to leave a woman an alternative—to let her name the conditions?

Marry. A nameless woman with only the clothes on her back. That was a dowry! . . . While he . . . She felt something cold envelop her—as if a shadow thrown by his name and forbears and fortune suddenly had fallen across her path.

What if . . . ? But that wasn't possible. The only possible thing was the thing that happened. If it didn't happen it wasn't possible. That's what fate was—the thing that happened. . . .

He saw her coming out and brought the machine up to the curb. She caught the door of the car as it swung open.

"He's gone," she said. "He left last night."

"Well?"

A pool into which one might plunge boldly, surrendering everything. . . . The burning tips of his fingers, again, against hers fumbling at the door.

Did it matter whose feet pressed out the wine of life so long as it flowed?

"I'll go with you," she said. "But I won't marry you."

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Chapter Thirteen

IN the west end of a house that once had served as a convent. The windows that gave on to the street had grills before them. Slender irons bars to shut out the world, Adrienne said. To imprison love. The entrance was up a short flight of steps leading from a recess which formed a courtyard. A rough-paved courtyard with a pepper tree shading it—weeping before the door.

The north windows looked clearly out upon the green waters of the bay. Green? Green or gray or blue according to its mood. There were no grills—no slender iron bars on these windows. You went down a long flight of steps from a little balcony into a sunken garden with a high wall about it against the sweep of trade winds. The air was still and warm in the garden, even when a high fog drew a curtain across the sun. A prim garden it had been once with box hedges and clipped bushes of lavender and rosemary and thyme. Now it was a disorderly riot with self-sown annuals coming up in the walks—honeysuckle against the wall, woodbine, benches in sheltered corners, niches that once had held shrines.

A house built upon a whimsical notion, occupied and vacated with an almost rhythmical frequency. The nuns had stayed longest. The last owner had left a curious huddle of furnishings—a carved Italian chest in the entrance hall; faded crimson hangings at the windows; a fourteenth-century Flemish bed of dark

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oak; dining-room chairs carved to a prim discomfort; scraps of Breton peasant crockery; Pewter tankards and platters. Picturesque, impractical. The loot of an hundred antique shops. Trophies of midsummer rambles on the Continent. Disassociated, unrelated, yet contriving to produce a dominant note of austerity.

Adrienne had shivered slightly on that first morning when they had gone to inspect it. The curtains had been drawn, the sun shut out for weeks. Carter, noticing her tremor, had said at once, "This won't do at all."

But her mood passed almost with his protest. There was the garden and the waters of the bay beyond, on this particular morning, as iridescent as a peacock's tail. She answered, "All it needs is sunlight and some flowers."

She swept the hangings back and the sunlight, slipping between the iron grills, made patterns on the dusty floor.

He said, still a little dubiously, "Perhaps with a thick rug or two—"

She stopped him with a white finger against his red lips. "No—no! . . . Let's have nothing fussy. I adore it just as it is."

"Really? . . . I hoped you would. I thought once of taking it myself—when—when I was alone."

"You came and looked at it, you mean?"

"Only from the outside. On the strength of the pepper tree in the courtyard."

"When can we move in?"

"Whenever you say."

"I say, now. . . . At once."

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"With all the dust and litter and tag ends?"

"With all the dust and litter and tag ends."

She shook off her cloak and tossed her hat upon a carved bench.

He caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"You make everything simple," he said.

* * *

This strange new life. It was as if one had passed through a door into a magic garden; a door that had opened of itself, mysteriously, and shut again, close locked against escape. The murmurs of the world drifted in with a sort of unreal reverberation, like the far-off sounds of firing upon a distant battleground. Growing fainter, fainter. The tangibilities of life retreating. . . . All hope, all energy, all desire, centered on a single objective, a single figure. A single figure that even in absence filled the rooms, the corridors, the garden; more intensely almost than the real presence. Was it thus that the nuns, pacing the same graveled paths in the morning sunlight, had felt the presence of God? Brides of Christ. Was there something more than empty imagery there?

Suddenly the facts of existence were surcharged with deep, indefinable understanding too tremendous for words—butterflies at play among the lavender and heliotrope; humming birds poised to despoil the honeysuckle; fuchsias swaying like miniature Columbines in their purple and crimson skirts. You saw through them, somehow, through their performance, through their careless rapture. The lilies, toiling not, arrayed in glory. Night, morning, noon, evening, flooded with

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hurting beauties. One sadly poignant moment in every day. The moment when the door closed upon him. When the world drew him into its maze again with only the silken clue of your love to guide him back at nightfall. A silken clue. What if it snapped? What if it snapped and he lost himself and could not find you again? Could not find Adrienne, waiting in the garden, through all eternity?

All the gilded day to oneself, for Carter left every morning at eight o'clock. Five minutes before that portentous hour he would fold up the morning paper and fill his pipe with tobacco and into his eyes would come a strange, alien look. The lure of the battlefield, the tumult of the market-place in his eyes. Every morning at that moment Adrienne's heart trembled. At that moment he escaped her, even more completely than in the moment of farewell. After she had closed the door upon his retreating figure, she recaptured him again. A fact to brood over, a memory to hold close-locked against his return at evening.

Her housekeeping was so ridiculously simple. Clearing away the frugal litter of breakfast. Two cups, two saucers, two plates to be washed . . . a handful of silver . . . the coffee-pot. . . . The Flemish bed to be made. Flowers to be gathered and strewn about. Every vase, every bowl, pressed into service. The gayety of flowers to light the somberness of the rooms.

Then to marketing in a little Italian market at the foot of the hill. For herself, food did not touch her. Sometimes she wondered what sustained her body. She scarcely ate. Her joy, her sustenance, lay in watching him. A little fruit, perhaps, at the end of the

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meal—an apple that he cut into quarters for her, a peach from which he skillfully slipped the skin, an orange peeled by his hands. Or, when he held up a bunch of amber grapes, she leaned across the table and plucked from the same stem. When they had pears and cheese they laughed, happy with memories. Pears and cheese under the grape arbor on that day when they fled into paradise. Their hands had touched over the pears and cheese. Blue-black clusters of grapes hanging down between the yellowing vine leaves. Blue black like his hair. She thought of the Song of Songs. She could sing as sweetly as Solomon. Any one with a lover could do that. . . . The hair of my beloved is a cluster of purple grapes among the yellow vine leaves. . . . How easy to sing when you had a lover. How easy to sing when you were in love. . . . My heart is a wine press filled with tender grapes. My heart is a wine press trodden by the feet of my beloved.

Over the pears and cheese. Her heart singing. And what of his? . . . Did his heart sing too? Beautiful words—a Song of Songs?

* * *

After marketing came the long, silent day in the garden. September was a gracious month in San Francisco. October not far behind it. If there were morning mists, they parted early. By nine o'clock the sun came out. A gentle, tender, soothing sun that was comfortable to sit in. To sit with needle and thread, or a book, or with just your thoughts.

There was a plane tree in the garden, turning sear. It rustled and shook itself in the vagrant breeze,

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releasing its golden dead, wistfully, reluctantly. Soon it would be bare. Adrienne longed for that moment, longed to see it free of its futile draperies. So it could stand unashamed in the sun, as she stood unashamed in the presence of love, all the associations of the past like dead leaves at her feet. Once they had been tender green—these hopes, these faiths, these people. To what purpose? That they might one day fall in a shower and subtly enrich her? As the dead leaves would subtly enrich the tree?

* * *

The bees were thick in the garden, clustering blackly about the purple stems of lavender bloom, and cotton moths descended in twinkling clouds of white, flittering joyfully among the pink and crimson cosmos. Birds, wheeling south, stayed a day, a week, a fortnight. Song sparrows settled down for the winter in the cypress and made the night air delirious with their amorous questing.

* * *

A garden close locked with a city roaring about it. The voices of the town mellowed by walls and hedges and green trellises. Mellowed, until they became as shadowy as memory.

* * *

At four o'clock the sun left the garden and it grew chill. Adrienne rose with a clipped sigh and went into the house. The next two hours were subtle torture. The nearer happiness drew toward you the more brittle,

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the more fragile it seemed—like a crystal ball flung into the air. There were so many chances that it might be shattered—that it would elude your eager hands and fall crashing to the ground. A thousand ridiculous fears crowded your faith. Your apprehensions stopped at nothing—even Death stalked unwittingly among your hopes.

The swooning delight of his step upon the outer stairs! Ah, but before that you heard his footfall passing under the shadow of the pepper tree. Heard it, but tortured your soul with its denial, making doubly sweet the later reality of his presence. . . . The crystal ball recaptured. Safe, unshattered, until it was flung skyward, again. Was it the daily peril that made the final security so luminous?

* * *

Nightfall and candles lit. The house was littered with dozens of candlesticks—candlesticks of brass, candlesticks of copper, candlesticks of silver, candlesticks of porcelain, candlesticks of glass. At the promise of so much flickering loveliness Adrienne scorned the electric lights.

She moved about the shadows, taper in hand, making little pools of gold in the soft gloom. Sometimes, when she did this, a little gust of memory swept Karl into her consciousness. Karl before the Christmas tree letting her wave a magic wand over it until it blossomed fitfully. "You must always do that, Fräulein . . . light up the gloom." A little gust of memory, passing swiftly, swallowed up in the hurricane of a vital present.

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The candles lit, there came an hour or so of music. Soft singing, soft playing. Carter, dreaming, rested, soothed, after his day on the battlefield, his wounds bound up in a swaddle of music. At the end, with a little stir, half sigh, half self-accusation he would say:

"You should be studying . . . if you are to be an artiste."

To-morrow, next week, next year. Time enough. Besides, what did it matter? . . . Just to live was complete justification.

* * *

A high wall to shut out the world. . . . But the world is an agile clown and can leap over most barriers. And in the dusk it sprang over the garden wall or squeezed through the iron gratings, crouching very still and quiet at first, so still you hardly knew it was there. Crouching to spring clownishly at your happiness. A grotesque thing, this world, intent on upsetting your composure.

There was the first night when Carter came home and dressed and went out again. A dinner party at the Forsythes. He hated it, of course, but it was impossible to withdraw completely, all at once. He had refused so many times that already there was comment. It was foolish the way your heart stood still when he told you.

But in the end pride conquered. You smiled upon his going and sat all evening shivering in the gloom, the table bleak and bare and upset, the basket of fruit untouched upon the sideboard. . . . He came home before midnight. His footfall this time upon the pave-

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ace, recuperating from wounds. Sent by his government in connection with the French Exhibit at the Exposition. Making speeches en route, creating sympathy for the cause. Propaganda, in short. Carter had been impressed. We ought to be in the war. What, America? Yes, why not? *Too proud to fight*—what a phrase! Carter made a wry face. Still, decent people didn't have to wait, decent people could plunge into it without waiting for their government. At least ten of his classmates had gone in already—ambulance corps, flying units, plain rank and file. His eyes glowed.

The world, crouching to spring clownishly at your happiness. Why did your heart stand still, tremble?

Let us talk of other things. The snow bird that came into the garden. The wrinkled old Chinaman who washes the windows. The first patter of the rainy season upon your roof.

If the world must be let in, let it be the world close at hand, genial and intimate, not the world ten thousand miles away—the world of smoke and tears and blood.

How self-contained and pitiless love is.

* * *

The days were growing shorter. By six o'clock everything was quite black. And a cold, damp chill was in the air. A crackle of logs was needed, now, in the fireplace. Adrienne drew the table near the blaze so that they dined in toasted comfort. Carter's nightly return home grew later and later, more uncertain. And he was tired, with creases of strain and

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worry between his eyes. He talked about his problems, now for the first time. Adrienne listened to the alien phraseology of the stock market and evolved a sort of poetry out of it. It took her back to the fairy-tale days when every story had begun, "Once there was a young man who went out to seek his fortune." Only here was a young prince with a talisman from his father, the king. A charm to ward off the evils of his adventure. A charm that ran into dollars, millions of them. Not all the Fosdick millions, but a certain definite sum for the prince to play with. He entered the lists with this sum and played a game. On the stock market. Adrienne knew something about this. She had heard Selina speak of it. Fortunes to be made and lost. Only, Selina's game had had to do with mining ventures—yields of gold and silver. Carter's game with the yield of orchard and grove and vineyard. Not the vineyard of the wine press, but the vineyard of the dried grape. Figs, apricots, prunes—dried; to be captured for the fighting hordes of Europe. To be captured and held until the price soared, soared. To fill the empty bellies of tramping men if they had the price. They? . . . Their governments. The same thing. Did Adrienne only fancy that a wearied contempt for his rôle had bitten into Carter's voice as he explained everything to her? . . . A certain definite sum set aside, no more, no less, with which the prince could prove his mettle, his right to inherit the realm of his father. Playing with the more precious gold of the soil. While the king, at the other end of the continent, played with the staff of life itself, in the market pit, with the bread of the people as a stake.

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She got the broad sweep of it, intuitively, without understanding the details—gambling with war and pestilence and famine. Even with Carter attempting lightness it had an ugly sound. And what if prices put food beyond the reach of empty bellies? Then empty bellies remained unfilled. In other words, they starved? . . . Precisely. It was an ill wind that blew nobody good.

* * *

One cannot sit silent with the world crouching in a corner. One must ask the world questions. It has scaled the wall and entered the house. Yes, since the world is there, you must ask it questions.

Adrienne took the newspaper with her into the garden. Before, what went on outside had not mattered. It did not matter, now, to her. But what went on outside affected Carter. She realized that for the first time. If they had both been shut up, in the cloister of their hearts' desire, things would have been different. But for one to be a prisoner and one free—she paused before the chilling significance of this thought. Were *both* ever prisoners? Was it even desirable? Carter in the garden all day long. Was that conceivable?

She read about the war now. Would Russia be able to release her granaries to feed her hungry allies? A correspondent told just how it would be accomplished. The mere suggestion had caused May wheat to drop a point. That would be interesting news for Carter's father, wouldn't it? The old money king, playing with the staff of life in the wheat pit. *May* wheat. What sort of wheat was May wheat? Car-

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ter explained that phrase, perfectly. But he laughed at the rumor about Russia. A mere bit of clever publicity to force the market down. Inspired by the old king himself, for all Carter knew. One never knew just what game the guvenor played. On a mere rumor, then, an invention, May wheat dropping a point. But how ridiculous! Didn't everybody see through the trick? A nervous market, reacting to every passing gust like a skittish horse. Adrienne accepted the explanation, but she maintained its absurdity with a stubbornness that brought chuckles to Carter's lips.

Why read the war news, then? . . . She wasn't interested in the fictions inspired by Fosdick, Senior. Well, here was the society column with the Jed Forsythes leading off in their usual style—luncheons, teas, dinner parties. A French Marquis in tow. Just like the old days when Baron von Stralendorf had been the motif. But fashions had changed. *Vive la France!* That was the fashionable cry now. Justine Forsythe. What energy! Facing every angle of life with supreme zest! Ignoring ugly facts! A negress for a kinswoman. Pouf! . . . Who would believe such nonsense? And it was what the world believed, nothing more nor nothing less, that mattered. Adrienne could see the dash, the insolence back of Justine's bravado. After all it had its magnificent aspects. Adrienne never could completely dislike Justine Forsythe.

And here on the financial page was Jed Forsythe's name in a little column of brevities on what stock-market plays the prominent financiers of the city were making. It was reported that Jed Forsythe was doing this, it was alleged that Jed Forsythe was doing

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that. And what was the significance of Carter Fosdick's appearance on the local curb? Carter Fosdick, the only son of old Simon S. Fosdick, the wolf of Wall Street—was he planning a coup—openly or under cover? . . . Nobody seemed to know.

How stupid everybody in high finance were! To be stampeded by a false report about Russian wheat. To be in doubt concerning Carter Fosdick's appearance upon the local curb. . . . Would he operate openly or under cover? Couldn't they put two and two together? . . . Jed Forsythe's name suddenly illuminating the financial page. Weren't Carter Fosdick and young Forsythe college chums—roommates? Couldn't they see through it? . . . Of course, Adrienne *knew*. Carter had told her. But she felt she could have gotten at the truth on the strength of just the stock-market brevities.

And one day the most interesting brevity of all—not a brevity, either, but a half column. Whom did the people of San Francisco fancy was back on the Street again? None other than Selina Parsons. Selina Parsons, anywhere from sixty-five to eighty, back again at her old haunts after an absence of nearly twenty years. Selina Parsons who never had been known to miss a trick. Selina Parsons who had made and broken more men than any other ten speculators in her day. Selina Parsons who could command millions mysteriously by lifting her finger. Selina Parsons, the breaker of wills, the winner of lawsuits, the rattler of ancient and honorable family skeletons. What was Selina Parsons back for? To share in the loot of war? To

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feed fat an ancient grudge? To scalp an enemy? Adrienne turned cold as she read it.

* * *

It rained for a week. The garden, even when the sun came out again, was damp and cold. The sun fell upon it with a feeble slanting. In the house Adrienne kept a red blaze going. Carter's mood was uncertain. Sometimes he was worn and on edge, sometimes gay to a point of childishness. He went out several nights a week. Adrienne made no protest. She understood. When one man uses another, he must pay the piper. Carter was using Jed Forsythe, hiding behind him, so that the financial world would not guess what power was back of the fluctuations of the local market. He had explained it all to Adrienne. She made no protest, but the first flush of her happiness was chilled. Carter going about with the Forsythe set. Carter sitting next to Bess. Did they ever speak of her? She wondered, but she had too much pride to ask. What did the Forsythes think had become of her? Carter must have given a satisfactory accounting. Or had they been so eager to dismiss her from their minds that they had accepted the first explanation? At the beginning it hadn't mattered. Carter had said, "Everything is all right." What more could one want? The world had been shut out, it scarcely mattered how. But, now, the world had broken down the barriers and you found yourself wondering what went on out there beyond the garden wall. In spite of yourself, you wondered.

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And there was Selina. Back on the Street, to use the jargon of the press. You knew so little about the game, even with Carter going into illuminating details. "Cornering the market," "selling short." Meaningless phrases. But the figure of Selina wasn't meaningless. She was a concrete fact that you knew, had lived with. You knew her tendernesses, her passions, her hatreds. You could add two and two together better than any financier. You didn't feel that a share in the loot of war had drawn her back to the curb. Wasn't Carter manipulating the market through Jed Forsythe? Two and two made *four,* didn't it? Adrienne thought and thought and thought. Sometimes her conclusions seemed reasonable, sometimes they seemed absurd. And one night she voiced them, one night when Carter had come home with his spirit disheveled by temporary reverses. He said, "Some one is fighting us. I wish I knew who it was."

Adrienne was silent for some moments. When she spoke the beating of her heart suffocated her. The risk of his sneer, his ridicule, filled her with a strange terror.

"Perhaps it is Selina Parsons."

He raised his eyes at her, as one raises his eyes at the incongruous prattling of a child. Then he broke into a laugh.

"My dear, don't be ridiculous!"

* * *

Adrienne abandoned the newspapers. The rain ceased, the sun came out and she went back to the garden, briefly, for an hour or two at midday. The yellow leaves had all dropped from the plane tree. They lay

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in soiled, clammy layers on the graveled walks. The moisture had taken the color out of the belated geraniums, the hollyhocks were bent with stubborn senility, the nasturtiums were rank and turning sear. Facing a temperate winter, without the sting of frost or sleet, dying slowly, pitifully, as one died slowly, pitifully, in a temperate old age.

"My dear, don't be ridiculous!" She couldn't get these words out of her head. They were like a thin veil that hung between Carter and her. It was the first intimation that there were reservations to their relationship. They moved in circles that touched at one point. That was all. He loved her but he thought her amusing. Well, perhaps not quite that. He loved her but he wanted to keep his circle of life and endeavor apart. "My dear, don't be ridiculous!" It was one way of saying "No trespassing." His life outside, then, was of no significance to her. Then why read about it?

Better to withdraw again into the cloistered silence of your own heart, to try and recapture the thrill of those first enchanted days. Carter no longer talked of his victories, his defeats. It was just as well. For, gradually, the outside world dissolved again, leaving you to your illusions.

Steeped in illusions, drugged by illusions, tricked by illusions. How real are the realities anyway? And one day of happiness is one day of happiness whatever the final reckoning.

* * *

One dripping night, when a southeast storm was

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hurling itself against the stubborn hills, Carter's machine broke down and so he rode home in a taxi-cab. He couldn't make change readily for the cab fare and the driver came and stood in the hallway while Adrienne went into the bedroom and rummaged in her purse for some silver. When she came back the cab driver had taken off his hat and was standing under a flood of electric lights which Carter had switched on. It was Stanley Denton.

He gave her a quick, shrewd glance and said:

"Oh, so you're married."

She felt a flush on her face and in the bungling silence which followed she saw his glance turn from appraisal to sneering understanding. She took refuge in an obvious question.

"How is your mother?" she asked.

"Dead."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! . . . And your father?"

Stanley gave a contemptuous shrug. "Married again."

Carter coughed impatiently. Stanley took the hint, pocketed the fare plus a generous tip and bowed himself out.

When they were standing before the fire Carter said:

"Who was that?"

Adrienne told him.

"Stupid sort of a coincidence—hiring him," was Carter's brief comment.

His tone was a trifle impatient. Adrienne remained silent.

After dinner Adrienne sat before the fire staring

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into it. She did not play nor sing. For one thing she had no wish to. And, then, Carter did not ask her. He read a book or pretended he was reading. She thought of Mrs. Denton that last time she had galloped over with Bud at her side. Dying on a decrepit plush lounge, or beginning the terrifying process there. . . . What sort of a woman had Jim Denton married? . . . Stanley looked almost handsome in his chauffeur's uniform and cap. What an irritating creature he was—with questions or comments always full of covert venom—like his mother. It had been so on that first day—when they were children.

How stupid to have flushed at his comment. She wasn't ashamed of not being married. Then why flush about it? And why was hiring Stanley's cab a stupid coincidence? . . . Would the world never leave them alone? . . . It was bad enough to have shadows cast by the great outside drift past the barred windows, but when flesh and blood crowded in, all barriers seemed destroyed. She had fought and triumphed over the shadows. But she had a sinking feeling that the entrance of Stanley Denton across the threshold was not to be so easily dismissed.

* * *

Why had she flushed at Stanley Denton's comment? The question would not down. Why did one flush over something one was proud of? Because it was concealed? . . . But did one conceal a thing that one was proud of? Because she had. And so had Carter. Had she been really proud she would have said: "You are mistaken. I am not married." Why wasn't she married?

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Just what intuition had guided her that day when she had said, "I'll go with you but I won't marry you"? Which was the greater reservation to love—marriage or freedom? Questions, nothing but questions, which one could never answer. She knew, more and more, that impulse, not calculation, ruled the world. At first, she had closed the door to be alone with happiness. But was she keeping the door closed because she had something to conceal? Or was her hold upon the treasury of love so slight that she feared competition—intrusion?

She thought one day as she sat in the garden, "I must test myself. I must open the door. I must even do more, I must go myself out into the daylight. I must be proud and unafraid."

What she meant was that she must touch life at all points. A cloistered love was cowardice.

But how to touch life—that was a problem. One must have contacts for such procedure. Suppose there was some one that she knew? Suppose she had a friend that to-morrow she planned to see, to talk to? She stopped short. Just the act of going to that friend, just the act of walking along the streets in the bright sunlight of broad day was terrifying. Down two blocks to market was nothing. But to walk blocks and blocks, to ride in a street car—it was unthinkable. Why? Because she would be sure to meet some one she didn't want to see. That was the truth of the matter, arrived at in a roundabout way. The truth that she had been avoiding.

Well, then, her first test of courage was to overcome this feeling. Why should she avoid any one?

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She was ashamed of nothing, of nothing at all. She had no mother, she had no father, she had no husband. But she had a lover.

My heart is a wine press filled with tender grapes. My heart is a wine press trodden by the feet of my beloved.

* * *

She sat no more in the garden. Instead, she went boldly out into the streets in the mellow November sunshine, walking aimlessly. She saw no one—not a soul she knew. She gained confidence, courage. But this was scarcely a test. To gain courage through an absence of danger was no great virtue.

She kept to the hills of the city. She liked to have the bay, in turquoise or jade somnolence, always before her gaze. And, in the distance, the towers of the Exposition beckoning her like an enchanted city. Or was it a dead city—a dead city enshrining the past?

She said, one afternoon as she looked down upon it: "I must see it again—once—before it closes." And next morning the sun shone so gayly that she made up her mind to go that day.

The walks and courtyards were jammed, crowded. Less than a week remained for the city to take advantage of these doomed splendors and San Francisco was crowding morbidly to the funeral feast. In spite of beauty, of serenity, you felt dissolution in the air.

Adrienne walked between the stiff rows of gaudy banners with a heavy heart. Was this dream city a symbol of the impermanence of all beauty? It hurt,

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somehow, to have it so real, so tangibly before you, knowing that its days were numbered.

Thousands upon thousands of faces, and yet she didn't know a single one. She felt a sudden, curious isolation. Even her cloistered garden did not engender such a sense of seclusion, of remoteness. Surrounded on all sides by human beings with faces that were masked—with hearts to which she had no key. And she remembered that this was the first time in her life that she had ever been alone in a crowd. She had never imagined such solitude. It was terrifying.

She thought, "I shall suffocate. I must leave, before I suffocate."

And at that moment she looked up to find Bud Forsythe bearing down upon her.

* * *

"What's the big idea?" It gave her a start to hear those familiar words again. Bud had guided her to a bench facing a trivial cascade of water leaping out of a lion's mouth. She knew what the question implied. Translated it meant: "Where have you been? . . . Where are you living? Who is supporting you?" She pretended to misunderstand and so she answered:

"I felt faint, suffocated . . . I'm not accustomed to crowds."

"Then you haven't been living in the city?"

She reflected, but only for an instant. "Right here in San Francisco. I seldom go out."

"In what part of town?"

"Oh, not far from here."

"Alone?"

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Her heart was beating fast. Why didn't she come out openly with the truth?

"Alone?" He repeated the question.

Her courage failed her. "Does it make any difference?" she parried.

"You mean it's none of my business?"

"Perhaps."

He smiled grimly. "Or are you ashamed to tell me?"

She felt herself flushing as she had done in the presence of Stanley Denton. There was only one reply to make to him, a reply so obvious that it escaped her instantly. "Ashamed! Of what?"

"How should I know? . . . But it's a natural question to ask."

"Under the circumstances, I think it's impertinent."

"*Under the circumstances*—that's just it. I'm not what you'd call a subtle guy but I know a thing or two. Fosdick's explanation of what had become of you may have satisfied the mater—it didn't satisfy me, though. Not by a damn sight. It was too vague, too casual. I could have snooped, of course, but that ain't exactly my line. . . . As a matter of fact it didn't satisfy the mater, either, or I miss my guess. She just accepted it. We all accepted it. If you wanted to throw us down for a better prospect that was your affair. . . . Just the same, I think you owed us something."

Her mood veered sharply to one of amusement. Could he be speaking seriously? His lips were set as thinly as such full lips could be and his blue eyes were without a single fleck of humor. Well, after all, she

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supposed the Forsythes had their viewpoint. "And just what did I owe you, may I ask?"

"The right to provide for you decently. After all, it wasn't your fault that you were part of a mess. . . . But you didn't have to make it worse. . . . You know, whatever happens we'll be blamed for it. We'd sort of accepted you, introduced you and everything. Just as if you had a place—belonged. You could have kept that place—in a way, and put us in right. As it is—people are saying to the mater, "Do tell me—and what became of that fascinating child—Adrienne, I think her name was? Adrienne Something-or-other."

She could not restrain a sarcasm. "And what does the mater tell them?"

"The first thing that comes into her head. The mater is nothing if not game. But it's a rotten shame putting her in such a hole."

Somehow she could only be amused at him. He was so completely the pouting child. And the picture that he drew of Justine's discomfort under fire was not particularly disquieting. Adrienne could not imagine "the mater" being seriously routed by a few venom-tipped questions regarding a discredited protégée.

"I suppose you think I'm a rotter," Bud went on in a petulant tone of self-justification. "But you didn't give me time. . . . Besides, I couldn't get anywhere with you holding on to that ridiculous story Selina Parsons cooked up. I daresay now you've come to your senses. You don't imagine, now, that—that—"

He broke off, unwilling to put such heresy into words.

She smiled at him sharply. "That I am Elizabeth

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Sinclair's daughter? . . . I was never more convinced of it. Never."

His face flushed hotly. "Why, the idea is ridiculous —indecent! If that were so you'd own us body and soul."

His words struck at her understanding with penetrating reverberations. She answered: "I'm beginning to think that I do. . . ." He gave her a puzzled glance in which there was a blend of fear, confusion. A sudden gust of triumph made her follow up her advantage. "You're all so afraid—so desperately afraid that I'll close in on you. You're so afraid you'll lose the Sinclair millions. So afraid that you're quite ready to be the object of my charity."

"The object of your charity!"

"Yes—every penny you spend is mine," she nodded at him almost gayly. "Every single penny."

His surprise was comic. For a brief instant he looked frightened, but a great thunderclap of vindictive indignation succeeded. "You must be pretty well fixed," he sneered, "to indulge in the luxury of supporting us so handsomely. I suspected as much. I didn't room four years with Carter Fosdick for nothing. I know when he's lying. And I know when he's philandering. His explanation didn't get by me, as I said before. . . . If you're married to him that's one thing. Congratulations. If you're not—" He finished with a shrug, his laughter keyed to derision.

She could feel herself grow pale. The trickle of water from the lion's mouth made a tinkling sound as it fell into the plaster basin. Philandering. The word was not new to Adrienne, but its meaning was a trifle

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clouded. Bud's eyes had turned from violet blue to two steely circles of envy and Adrienne saw that in that moment he hated Carter Fosdick as only a man can hate a comrade who has outdistanced him.

She rose with an air of disdain, glad that his insolence had given her a mask for her tremulous apprehensions. He was on his feet in an instant, flushing hotly. "Damn it all!" he cried, "you mustn't take everything I say too seriously! . . . I mean, I struck below the belt. I didn't mean to. But you—can't you see how puzzling, how infuriating you are! I just can't get a line on you. . . . As a matter of fact I'm still in love with you. I've always been, I guess. And if you'd given me time—if you'd—oh, well, what's the use! But I could have handed you a better deal than he has. That is if you'd wanted it."

She faced him clearly. "I couldn't wish for a better deal than I'm getting," she said, almost too passionately.

He caught her confession full on and the triumph of it crumpled his spirits. "Then there's no more to be said. . . . Can I drop you somewhere? My car's outside the grounds."

Her first thought was, "If I accept, he'll find out where I live." But almost at once her pride outran her caution. "Yes, you may drive me home," she answered with a touch of triumph.

* * *

As they were stepping into Bud's car who should come along but Forrest Deering.

"Well," he cried, rubbing his hands together, "of

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ll people! And where have you been all these weeks? thought you'd committed the grand indiscretion, verybody was so mysterious."

"That was stupid of them," returned Adrienne, fixng him with a disconcerting gaze.

He shrugged gayly. "Gad, you're as cool and self-possessed as ever. . . . Which way are you going, Bud? Downtown? . . . Well, I'll just hop in, then, if you don't mind, and save taxi fare."

Adrienne was glad of this third presence. Forrest Deering's gay impudence lifted her spirits. In less than five minutes the car was drawn up to the curb, again, and Adrienne stepping out.

"Ah, so this is where you hide yourself! Under a pepper tree. Aren't you going to invite me to call? . . . I'm still a desolate grass widower."

She tried to seem inconsequential as she answered: "Oh, yes, by all means come and see me. I'll be delighted."

Bud lifted her out and walked up to the door with her. "I hope," he said awkwardly, "that this hasn't been embarrassing. Bringing Deering along, I mean."

He looked puzzled and unhappy. She felt sorry for him. "Why should it make any difference?" she asked, as she turned the key in the lock and swung the door open. "Won't you come in?"

"Thanks, no," he replied.

She held out her hand. He took it limply. "Perhaps," she said, "under the circumstances we can't be friends, but is it necessary for us to be enemies?"

"I've tried to hate you," he returned naïvely, "but it can't be done."

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"We both said horrid things to-day. Let's not pretend we didn't mean them, because that would be silly. But, in spite of it all, I'm glad I saw you."

He let her hand slip from his. Then he stood for a moment in embarrassed silence. "You needn't be afraid," he began finally. "I shan't say anything to anybody. . . . I shan't even mention it to Carter. I mean that I know."

"I shall tell him that," she said steadily.

"Don't!" he warned.

"Ah, but I must," she insisted.

He turned and left her. She stepped into the house and closed the door.

* * *

Over the black coffee she told Carter. She began confidently enough. "And whom do you think I ran into to-day?" He did not even pretend to guess. "Bud Forsythe . . . He was too ridiculous!"

She realized that her voice was keyed to a nervous apprehension. He gazed at her a little coldly. "Ridiculous? . . . In what way?"

"In the things he said."

"You—you talked to him?"

"Yes—wasn't that right?"

"Where did you see him?"

"At the Exposition. . . . I took a notion to go this afternoon. I suppose it was stupid of me." He sat silent, running the scalding coffee through his spoon. "He brought me home in his car. Forrest Deering came along too. You're not displeased, I hope."

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He tapped his spoon against the cup. "Displeased isn't quite the word. But it was unfortunate—at this time. He might put two and two together." He gave her a searching glance. "You see, I'm assuming that you told him nothing."

The chill in his tone struck at her like a thin, sharp blade. "It wasn't necessary. He seemed to know. He said your explanation hadn't satisfied them."

He shrugged. "Oh, well, I suppose it had to come out sooner or later."

"But you hoped it would be later?"

Her tone made him color. "Well, since you put it so—yes. If the guvenor heard things, now, he might be nasty. He's a moral old thing."

"Won't he be just as moral later on?"

"Later on, I'll have my stride. When I've pulled my deal I'll be on my own."

* * *

Carter said to her the very next morning at the breakfast table: "I've been thinking things over for some time. We ought to be married."

He said it as gently, as considerately as one could imagine. Yet she felt as if he had struck her. "Not now!" she breathed back passionately.

"You mean—never?"

"Perhaps. . . . At least, let's wait until you are on your own. It won't seem so cowardly then."

A slow, painful flush that crept up to his black hair told her how unerringly she had aimed. To marry, now, before the guvenor heard things. To marry, now,

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to prevent him from being too nasty. A ceremony would go a long way with the guvenor. A moral old thing!

"I blame myself," he began. "I blame myself enormously. I should have insisted at the—"

"Don't!" she cried. "Please don't!"

"But I don't understand—I can't imagine why—"

Something in his face, his tone, told her that she must act quickly to save her happiness from premature wreck. Poignance, intensity, were not the notes to sound. She touched his forearm playfully. "Don't try to understand," she laughed at him. "You are so much nicer the other way!"

Her puff of gayety scattered the clouds. He kissed her finger and picked up the newspaper. She went on toasting a muffin.

As he was leaving he said with an attempt at sounding casual: "And where are you excursioning, today?"

"Nowhere. From now on I'll keep to my garden. After all, there is nothing nicer than my garden."

He turned her face upward and kissed her on each cheek. "It won't be long, now," he said.

"It won't be long until what?" she asked herself as his footsteps echoed through the courtyard and died away.

* * *

Warm days again, warm dry days. At midday the garden was tipped with Spring. If you raked the leaves you found green shoots pushing up from the lily bulbs that the nuns had planted. A false spring. You

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knew it was false. For between December and April there were bound to be gray, sodden days and mornings strident with north wind, when the air was not still and the roofs glistened with frost. That is, it was bound to be so at Lakeview. San Francisco was farther south but the sea lay at its feet. And the sea was always full of winter caprice. But may one not enjoy a false spring? False springs like false joys were sweet to the taste as you sipped them. The bitterness lay after—at the end of the drained cup.

But were joys false because they one day came to an end? Or did they come to an end because they were false? A teasing question. But why question, at all? Life was to be lived, not nagged into unloveliness. Consider the lilies of the field. It wasn't so much that they neither toiled nor spun, but that they bloomed without anxieties for the withering wind that might come to-morrow. It was so with the tips from forgotten bulbs pushing up under the yellow leaves from the plane tree. The rain had fallen, the sun had shone warmly. And so they grew bold. But what of January frosts and the hail-storms of March? Ah, well, there was such a thing as adventuring.

Adrienne smiled over these thoughts. They reassured her. She was so like a forgotten lily bulb herself, pushing up before her time. Seventeen. Seventeen and with a lover. Some people would still call her a child. *Some* people? Most people. People who had grown so far away from seventeen that they had forgotten its capacities, its intensities, its torrents. But most of all they had forgotten its madness. The best thing about youth. Madness. Only fools wish to re-

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capture youth to relive it more prudently. The wise know that they never have been quite mad enough.

* * *

Adrienne looked up the word philander in the dictionary. Playing at love. It gave her a little sinking feeling remembering Bud's venomous triumph as he had used it. He knew when Carter was lying and he knew when he was philandering. College chums. The things they could tell on each other. But it was shameful of Bud, just the same, to speak that way—to strike below the belt, as he had put it.

Could it be that all men played at love and that it was only women who lived it? Take Kajetan for instance—Kajetan, her father. Why did she suddenly remember him? And why did she remember him with truant affection? She should have hated him. A man who played at love, who played at fatherhood, who played at politics. The daughter of a prime minister. What if it some day came true? Dashing in a coach of state up and down the capitals of Europe. In a Cinderella coach all gilt and footmen. The war over. Perhaps she would meet Karl again. To meet Karl as the daughter of a prime minister. What fun! Dear, dear Kirl . . . Why, she was day dreaming!

And here was Carter home before his time. She rushed forward to greet him in a sort of panic, scattering scissors and thimble and bright spools of silk all over the garden. He looked grave and disturbed though he tried to smile. Her first thought is the first thought of every woman whose man comes home before his hour. "What is the matter, are you ill?"

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Ill! . . . Hardly. But he has something to tell her. About—about some one close to her. Karl! Why is her first thought of Karl? No, not Karl . . . Mammy! Not Selina this time—but Mammy. No, it is not about Mammy. But, it seems, her father—

Adrienne sits down upon the bench. It is in the paper. Carter feared she might see one before he got home—that she might read it alone. He reads it to her—very gently, very tenderly. Found—the great Kajetan, in a hotel in Washington with a dagger in his back. A war plot. By one of the enemy's agents doubtless. The great Kajetan done to death while building up propaganda for a free Bohemia. In his room—dead—with a dagger in his back. Kajetan who played at love, played at fatherhood, played at politics.

The daughter of a prime minister. Dashing about the capitals of Europe in a gilt coach. Meeting Karl again . . . No, she would never meet Karl again. Two tears well up and roll down her cheeks. Two tears that Carter kisses away. Carter who loves her too much to risk letting her hear sad news alone.

With a dagger in his back—the great Kajetan—how horrible!

* * *

It isn't that you loved your father. You admired him, you thrilled to him, you were proud of him. But no, you did not love him. And yet you wept, felt sad. Something bright and brilliant had been shattered. He had sacrificed you to political ambition. It had not been expedient to claim you because a hint of immorality might weaken his cause. Immorality. Creating

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life was immoral it appeared unless that act bore the stamp of trivial symbols. You could create a picture, a poem, a sonata, without benefit of clergy. But life—a profound thing like life must be sanctified. Whatever that meant. Well, he had made his choice between fatherhood and the chance of becoming a prime minister and now he was dead with a dagger in his back. And you were sad. Would you have been as sad if Carter had not been there to comfort you? Weeping in solitude is a barren performance. Weeping before strangers little better, but weeping when your lover's arms were around you—sadness was a luxury, then!

* * *

For days the papers were full of the tragic death of the great Kajetan. An enormous and secret pride stirred Adrienne as she read all the glowing tributes. The foremost artist of his time. A brilliant personality. The blood of this man was in her veins. The pride of being a Sinclair was nothing to this.

If he had guessed he was to die would he have left her a message? . . . Would he have given her a rule to live by? It was not necessary—she knew his philosophy. He had told it to her that morning on the hillside. To break chains—always to break chains. A perpetual flight from enslavement. Ending at last with a dagger in his back. Living dramatically. Captured at last. Or had he been freed? Who could say?

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Chapter Fourteen

A COLD wind blowing up from the bay. A wind chilled by a huge bank of fog from the Contra Costa marshes. Christmas in the air. Fir trees in the fruit stalls, wreaths of redwood in the florist shops. The tang of bruised evergreens made Adrienne homesick for Laguna Vista. Homesick for the first time. For the first time she realized that Laguna Vista was gone forever. Laguna Vista gone, Karl gone, Kajetan gone. How swiftly the stream of life was flowing.

One morning when she came home from her marketing who should be sitting on her doorstep but Selina. The same hat of coarsely woven straw, the same spotless kerchief folded across the narrow chest, the same glint of gold hoops at the ears. But the shoulders were stooped and the eyes dulled.

Once inside the house Selina seated herself before the fireplace and took off her hat. "I've come to spend the day," she announced.

"How did you know where to find me?" asked Adrienne.

Selina's thin lips widened into a chuckle. "I've known from the beginning. I've got just the right nose for smelling out secrets."

Adrienne waited for questions, but none came. Selina rambled about the house with nonchalant inquisitiveness. She made slighting comments about the sketchy furnishings. In the bedroom she picked up

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a photograph of Carter, picked it up and studied it, squinting her eyes, but she said nothing.

Adrienne cooked lunch while Selina sat before the fire darning some stockings she had brought with her in a gaudy bag. It was the first time that Adrienne ever had served Selina. She kept wondering what had brought Selina to her door. Selina ate with relish but she had little to say. None of the questions which Adrienne half hoped for, half dreaded, fell from Selina's lips. Not a mention of Laguna Vista, not a word about Adrienne's erratic disappearance, not a speculation concerning Adrienne's present life.

After the meal, they went out into the garden and sat upon a bench. Selina was charmed.

Adrienne said: "This was once filled with gray nuns."

"Nuns?"

"Yes, the house was a convent."

Her words plunged Selina into a reverie. "Did I ever tell you about that convent in New Orleans where I scrubbed floors?"

"You've mentioned it but that was all."

Selina thought a moment. "Then, I'm going to tell you about it, now."

Adrienne waited while Selina threaded a needle.

Presently Selina began. But the tale went back beyond the convent days—back to the morning in the old plantation library when she had said:

"I wants to be free, Marse Sinclair, *that's what!*"

Back beyond the convent days and past them; the convent was a mere interlude between *stirring acts.*

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The linen-room of the Bayou Hotel, the drummers with their lascivious questions, marriage, San Francisco. Again in charge of linen. Again procuring. Married, respectably married, but still procuring. Selina did not use the precise word, but her meaning was clear. Adrienne knew instinctively. Strange how many questionable facts of existence one knows instinctively. Selina was literal and gay and bitter, all in a breath. The air grew chill. They went in and sat before the fire. All afternoon, before the fire, listening to Selina. Wandering back with Selina into the jungles. For it was curious the more the story swung forward the greater was its hark backward. The present was a muddy pool mirroring the past. Adrienne saw vaguely the very genesis of Selina. . . . Great green forests that had no open spaces, through which the sun could never filter . . . idols that raised hideous faces in the moonlight and devoured children . . . curious birds, scarlet and gold and silver, flying from limb to limb . . . animals with great tails swinging from the trees.

And strangely mixed with this dark pattern the silver thread of a more luminous heritage. A heritage filled with the pathos of swift, intense glimpses of horizons never to be achieved. . . . Mixed bloods forever at the fever-heat of civil war . . . consuming themselves . . . laying waste happiness. Achieving moments of beauty as clashing sabers do in the sunlight.

A sort of crooning saga. A confessional. For the first time in her life Selina telling her complete story: its ugliness, its beauty, its intense vitality, its human-

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ness, its inconsistencies. Married, respectably married! How Selina flung this fact at Adrienne. A fragment of conformity upon a sea of license.

It was dusk when Selina was finished and she rested her head against the high-backed chair and closed her eyes. Her faintly brown skin had a greenish tinge and her face was as immobile and frozen as a death mask. Adrienne rose quietly.

When Selina opened her eyes again, Adrienne stood beside her with a glass of Benedictine. Selina took the liqueur and sipped it. Her free hand strayed over to Adrienne's fingers. The contact made Adrienne shiver. The shadow of a sadly bitter smile played about Selina's lips.

"What-for you shiver, honey?" she said, lapsing into her plantation dialect. Adrienne could find no answer. "I know. You don't have to tell me. It's because Marse Sinclair's blood is in my veins." The pensiveness in her eyes became barbed with pride, with triumph, with a touch of venom. "The same blood in our veins. That's what made you shiver." She tossed Adrienne's hand away. "Don't I know? If I was your slave, you wouldn't shiver. I was a mother to you, but that didn't matter. Nothing mattered when you found out . . ." She rose suddenly, one finger upraised in prophetic warning. "I'll get you all yet! . . . You watch, I'll get you, I say. I'll get you!"

Selina would have fallen, but Adrienne caught her and let her slip down into the chair. Selina breathed hard and presently she put out her hand again. Adrienne took it.

"There, there, honey! . . . You ain't shivering now,

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is yer? . . . After all, I was your Mammy. Don't you ever forget that!"

* * *

"After all, I was your Mammy. Don't you ever forget that!" Selina's words rang in Adrienne's ears long after the old woman had left. *Was* your Mammy. Had Selina used the past tense deliberately or subconsciously? A pang born of the inevitability of crumbling human relationships crept over Adrienne. She remembered Karl's words: "People outgrow things—dolls, pigtails, friends. Outgrow them, overnight. . . . It is just one of the things that happen."

She was glad of one thing—in that final moment, she had triumphed over her instinctive recoil. She had been able to take Selina by the hand without any feeling of repugnance. Yes, she had been her Mammy. It was something to have recaptured that fact.

Mammy of the musky coolness of the fig grove, parting the gloom. Mammy, slender and bronze like the turkeys slinking through the shade—slender and bronze without their iridescence. Mammy taking her on that first memorable visit to the Dentons', soothing her secret hurt as the hairy-chested Joe rowed them home again. Mammy teaching her how many two and four were. Mammy telling tales of enchanted folk. Mammy helping her learn "the apples are ripe in the orchard." Mammy singing, "Tassels on My Boots." Mammy swallowed up in the soft blur of a wistful past. A soft blur through which one got occasional sharp glimpses when a gust of memory stirred. But a Mammy as dead as if she were already in her shroud.

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In spite of a touch here and there of sentiment, the woman who had called upon Adrienne that afternoon had been Selina Parsons—no more, no less. Selina Parsons—one-time procuress. Selina Parsons, blackmailer. Selina Parsons whose delight lay in tearing down. What had brought her? Curiosity, malice, tenderness? A mixture of all these things, doubtless. And her tale—to what purpose had she given Adrienne all the ugly details of her life? To relieve the tension of her soul or to let another Sinclair know the turbid waters that could flow from so high a source?

If she had come to warn Adrienne of impending disaster she had changed her mind. She asked Adrienne no questions, she offered her no advice. There was something chilling in the memory of her cool detachment, in her acceptance without comment of things as she found them. "Remember, I was your Mammy." This cry could so easily be translated into: "Remember, I am no longer your Mammy!"

War to the knife! Is this what Selina's cryptic visit had meant to imply? Perhaps she had wanted Adrienne to beg for quarter.

She had come and gone, mysteriously, like a thin wraith from the past and her visit was at once a reëstablishment and a termination.

Outgrown—over night. . . . As one outgrows a frock that one is loathe to part with. Folded in tissue paper—away from sun and moths. To be taken out and shaken and brooded upon. But never to be worn again. Discarded for a new cloak of happiness. A new cloak that will be changeless—last forever.

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It is so with every frock and cloak at the first wearing.

* * *

The truce of the Christmas holidays. Carter declined all invitations and stayed in the cloistered calm with Adrienne. A strange, happy Christmas. Adrienne bought a tiny tree at the market and went as far afield as Polk Street for ornaments. But there were no candles this time, just a string of winking electric lights, hard and without mystery. She thought of Karl. Was he lighting a tree somewhere? Or did he have to be content with the chill glitter of stars—stars over a battlefield?

She had presents without end. Every wish, great or trivial, that she had ever voiced, Carter made real. Nothing had escaped him. He himself was deluged with gifts. From the first corners of the globe, it seemed to Adrienne. More than ever before, she realized the meaning of the word companion. She was in competition with the world of every gift he opened. Every gift he opened revived memories, drew upon his reserve of affection. The realization made her glad with pride even if it gave her a momentary pang. To hold him against all the world! That was a glorious thought.

It rained a heavy grey fog that hid out every distant view. It was as if even the elements had conspired to draw a curtain about their happiness. A fire crackled all day in the fireplace. Like a vivid carpet pattern across the tiled floor lay the sun. The pepper tree was very vain of itself for the yellow berry

in the garden were beaten steadily into the earth. They had traditional Christmas food. And pears—winter pears this time—and cheese along with their black coffee. . . . Pears and cheese to revive the memory of that first meal under the grape arbor—to recapture summer and its gilded ecstasy.

A glowing fire instead of sunshine, a beamed ceiling instead of a grape arbor overhead. But how easy to reconstruct the picture with Carter sitting opposite her, to feel again the thrill of that moment when their hands had first touched. Carter biting into his pear with sharp, white teeth. The full redness of his lips, the immaculate slenderness of his body, his black hair touched with grape purple like the clustering fruit hanging below the trellis. Beauty of form and line and limb. Youth beautiful. Youth made for love. Youth with feet for pressing out the wine of life. Enduring youth. Youth—the new cloak of happiness that will last forever.

Never to be outgrown? Never to be discarded? Impish questions as light as thistledown and as scattered. But there are seeds even in thistledown. Seeds that can grow into barbed realities. How hard to understand, to realize, when thistledown is so light—so very light. And so easily blown away.

The hair of my beloved is a cluster of purple grapes among the yellow vine leaves. Is it necessary to press beyond so glowing a fact?

* * *

The covenant of Christmas peace lasted into the New Year and the steady drip of rain with it. But, with

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January, came steely weather, hard and cold and glittering. The sun shone brightly, taking pace from the flinty atmosphere. All softness seemed gone from life.

Adrienne, depositing the withered Christmas tree upon the hearth, felt the climatic stab.

The dying heat from the ashes waxed again at contact with the fir tree's resinous boughs. A moment of smoldering, a puff, and the symbol of a gentle season was gone. Adrienne held her palms before the blaze, pressing them to her lips at last, as if she wanted to taste warmth and glow and fragrance that she knew had vanished never to return.

She sought the garden and found even its pensive charm routed. Gusts of chill wind leaped over the fence, making mockery of the cypress hedges. The plane tree shivered nakedly. The sodden leaves had become light and aimless, blowing about in futile circles like withered souls midway between despair and paradise. Had such harshly blue days routed even the calm of the nuns as they prayerfully paced the garden walks? . . . Adrienne fled into the house again, busying herself with practical pursuits. Even she found dreaming impossible.

Days followed days—barbed with keen, cool sunshine, brisk with blade-like wind. A defiant pessimism stalked the streets, blew in between the iron bars at the windows. Wars and rumors of wars. The stock-market went soaring, one day, plunging the next. Carter was on edge, quivering like a young colt, awaiting the starter's signal. America upon the brink of war! Did Adrienne know what effect America committed to conflict would have upon the price of bread? Or

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the price of any foodstuffs, for that matter? The King in Wall Street playing with the staff of life. The Prince in San Francisco playing with the yield of vine and fig tree. Reaching out for the rice market . . . the canned fruit market . . . hides, tallow, mutton on the hoof. Trying to corner the dinner-pail of a nation. Becoming bold. Throwing off his cloak. The Street knew at last who was behind Jed Forsythe, but Jed Forsythe was playing his own hand now, following the leader.

And what of Selina Parsons? A chuckling old figure on 'change. Apparently doing nothing more than looking things over. Throwing a hundred or two upon the board to give zest to the game.

A scout for larger interests? A question to shrug over. No one could quite tell what tricks Selina Parsons was up to. The old guard granted her great sagacity and prowess. Younger blood was contemptuous. A spent negress without apparent resources holding promise or menace to speculation? It was too ridiculous! So ran the gossip in the column devoted to stock-market brevities. Adrienne read them and felt apprehensive.

* * *

Up and down, up and down, down and up. For days the financial see-saw continued. A moment of sudden stability. Carter was winded but smiling. Apparently stocks were performing to suit him. Up, UP, UP, UP! . . . A crash! Unexpected, unreasonable, unprecedented! Caught in a jam. Young Carter Fosdick, Jed Forsythe. By unknown interests. Unknown interests

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operating under the name of Selina Parsons. At last the truth was out. But what unknown interests? Look up Selina Parsons and interview her. Easier said than done. Selina Parsons had vanished into thin air—as only Selina could vanish Scour San Francisco for her, hunt through Oakland. To no purpose. Rumors, speculation. Can it be that Simon S. Fosdick himself has been playing the board against his own son—to trick him, to make sport of him, to chasten him? This smart-alec younger generation. A good drubbing does them good, takes the conceit out of them. A fantastic guess, this. But one that grows in favor. . . . A son beaten by his shrewd, old fox of a father. The public holds its sides. After all, nobody loses. That is, no Fosdick loses. It is all in the family. A father merely stakes his son to a game of poker and wins back his own money. Tough on the kid, of course, humiliating, but a lesson, good training. It isn't all fathers who take the time to teach their offspring the game in such practical fashion. Next time Carter Fosdick will know his onions.

But how about Jed Forsythe? Well, if a greenhorn *will* play follow the leader he must take the consequences. Not completely ruined, of course? That is to say, not the entire Sinclair millions? Practically everything. Well, well, well! Justine Wentworth didn't make such a good match after all.

* * *

The night of the crash. Would Adrienne ever forget it? Carter coming up the paved courtyard under the pepper tree. She was watching for him through the

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iron grating. It was dusk. Dusk, almost totally dark, and yet she saw his face distinctly, a white face, like a ghost's. Something warned her not to move toward the opening door with her usual greeting. Something warned her not to run gayly taper in hand from candle to candle, sowing the gloom with lights. Instead, she kept her place at the window and called his name. He shrank back a moment, then plunged boldly forward as if he had not heard her. And, as she kept her distance, she heard the door of the bedroom slam upon his retreating figure. The next sound was the turn of a key in the lock, followed by the hard, heartbreaking sobs of a man. It made her shudder. She had never heard a man give way to grief. She fluttered helplessly to the door and beat gently upon it. The sobs continued, stopped short. But the key did not turn to admit her. . . . Locked out! She was to have no share in his despair then. All night she crouched before the door waiting for the sound of the key again. She fell asleep, finally, with her head tilted against the hard paneling. It was morning when she awoke. She was stiff and cold.

She heard him moving about. She rose.

"Carter," she called. "Carter, is—is there anything I can do?"

"Yes, you can get me a cup of coffee."

She dragged herself into the kitchen and lit the gas range.

* * *

Many times in her life after that she remembered Carter's demand with profit. Service was not a matter

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of heroics, or tenderness, or emotion. It was a matter of doing the simple, the trite thing. Lighting the kitchen range to make a cup of morning coffee for a man who had been through hell.

* * *

Carter took to his bed. Pneumonia—exhaustion, really, the doctor said. Adrienne was in the seventh heaven of delight. To wait upon him as she had once waited upon Karl. And yet her heart bled for him—he was so confused, so shattered. Like a child. To lose his venture was one thing, to be tricked by his father was quite another. A wire came from Fosdick, Senior: "Settle up and come home." He tore it to bits and cursed under his breath. . . . There was the matter of Jed Forsythe, ruined. Not that Jed hadn't been a free agent. Carter hadn't urged him to risk a penny of his own, but there was no mistaking the lead given. If it had been lost legitimately it wouldn't have been so bad. But lost, to the guvenor. It was too disgusting! There was no mistaking what Jed had thought. Whatever the turn of the wheel, Fosdick, Senior, would be back of his son. Carter might fail at his end and the old man charge it up against him, but old Simon S. wouldn't let the ship sink. A sure tip. Any move backed by the elder Fosdick couldn't go wrong. Well, Fosdick, Senior, had fooled them—wrecked the ship himself. Diabolically, deliberately. The details were more or less puzzling to Adrienne, but she got the essentials. The son made sport of by his father—the fox of Wall Street. How much of the plot was chargeable to Selina? Had the scheme always been in old

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Fosdick's head from the moment he had left his son alone in San Francisco with a stake? Or had the entrance of Forsythe into the game given Selina the germ of such a diabolical idea? . . . If that were so she had had her revenge for the day when, listening at Elizabeth's bedroom door, she had heard Justine Wentworth call her a filthy nigger! . . . Well spent had been those early morning hours with Selina serving old Fosdick, Senior, breakfast at Laguna Vista; serving him irreproachable breakfasts and chatting about Comstock days and Con Virginia and letting him in on the secret of her genius for intrigue and manipulation.

Letters from Fosdick, Senior, followed the wire. For the most part, jocose letters. Treating the whole thing as a colossal joke. A sort of now-you'll-respect-your-old-dad attitude. Carter wrote, once—briefly. "You might have the decency to square things with Forsythe," was the burden of his note. Fosdick, Senior, replied by telegram.

"I'm no man's financial wet nurse."

An expression of final and complete disillusionment passed over Carter's face as Adrienne read it to him.

"Don't worry," she said gently. "I'm sure Jed Forsythe is the last man to expect help."

He nodded. "Or to allow it. He'd refuse, of course. Any gentleman would. This wire merely shows up my father. He's a bigger rotter than I thought he was."

* * *

Days of convalescence. Busy days, too. All the

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financial mess to be cleared up. Conferences with all sorts of people—Jed Forsythe included. Adrienne kept in the background during these hours which usually left Carter exhausted. Jed Forsythe was as debonair and nonchalant as one could imagine. And his manner of accepting Adrienne's presence as a perfectly natural fact—it was magnificent. His attitude may not have been aggressively moral—one might fancy or even wish an older man more concerned over the situation of a girl of seventeen at odds with the conventions—but it was enormously well bred.

He sounded the keynote of his attitude at their first meeting. She opened the door to his ring and stood staring awkwardly at his unexpected appearance.

"Oh, my dear—*you!* Well, this is pleasant."

"And how is Mrs. Forsythe?"

"Marvelous. . . . Up to her eyes in packing. Going into the country for a while. . . . Is our patient receiving? Good! I'll go right in, then."

Not even a lifted eyebrow.

Adrienne could have hugged him.

Going into the country for a while—Justine. To Hillsboro, doubtless. But it seemed that Adrienne was wrong if the society columns of the newspaper had the matter correctly. According to that report Mrs. Jed Forsythe was fed up with Hillsboro and her town house and all the cares and anxieties of large establishments, and she was going to dig into the wilderness for a season—she and Miss Elizabeth, who adored the simple life. They had chosen Laguna Vista as their objective. The Sinclair place on Crystal Lake. Camping out, really, because only last fall the historic old

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mansion had been destroyed by a grass fire. It stated also that the Clifford Woods had leased the Hillsboro house for five years and it was rumored that an equally prominent member of the social set was to take over the family home on Jackson Street.

Bess at Laguna Vista—camping out. How she would hate it! And Justine, who adored green lawns and graveled walks and gay awnings.

Adrienne felt sorry, but she liked the courage back of it. Retreating with a rattle of drums and colors flying. They may have lost their money but they still had their pride. Sinclair blood was still a social asset. People had yet to point the finger of scorn or lift their eyebrows in that direction. Yes, Justine Sinclair still felt superior among an aristocracy born of mining camp and bawdy seaport. There was none in San Francisco who could cast stones at *her* ancestry.

* * *

At last the business all settled. Carter was still weak. The new year was well into January. It rained again, then cleared. By midday the air was like the air of smiling April. They went every noon into the garden and sat until three o'clock. Then the shadows began to lengthen and they went indoors. Quiet, happy times, these. Reading books together, planning together, daydreaming together. When Carter was quite strong again they would be married. At least, that was his plan. Adrienne nodded, but she wasn't entirely reassured, entirely satisfied. There was something in Carter's attitude that suggested restitution and Adrienne found herself hating a solution to the prob-

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lem from that angle. The surge of Carter's desire had passed and perhaps from one point of view the impulse toward a permanent adjustment had finer qualities because of this very fact. But an absence of emotion made the gesture seem cut and dried, robbed it of any stamp of inevitability. Was it always so with a delayed marriage ceremony? Did it always seem a little flat, a little stale? . . . Adrienne wondered. But she offered merely a silent acquiescence, feeling that the reality was a trifle vague and shadowy.

Presently a new, strange element entered in the lives of both of them—a lack of money. Money had never meant anything to Adrienne because she had seen so little of it. And it had never meant anything to Carter because he always had had plenty. Fosdick, Senior, at the beginning of the crash had wired out a generous amount for his son's personal use. Carter had flung it back with all the scorn of youth tricked and disillusioned. To have his father trap him and then shower him with figurative caresses—that was the final insolence. No, he'd starve first—an intangibility that was easy to face in the flush of indignation.

The first hint of this intangibility made fact came one morning when the Italian market man refused further credit. Refused soup-bone and vegetables and a dozen eggs to the son of the second richest man in America. Adrienne was a little stunned. She went back to the house empty handed. But, somehow, she couldn't tell the son of Simon S. Fosdick that an Italian vendor of food had failed them. Instead she said, "I've decided to shop downtown. That man hasn't anything fit to eat in his entire shop."

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She lay all night pondering. The generous allowance that Carter had left with her for household expenses before the crash was gone. And he had been too ill and too unused to thinking in terms of an empty purse even to inquire about it. She hated to broach the subject—it would be so much easier to have him bring up the question. In the end he would, of course, but meanwhile—

Suddenly it came to her what people in stories always did when they were desperately pushed for money—they pawned their possessions—diamonds and furs and silver plate. But she had none of these things. All she possessed were the few trinkets that Carter had given her for Christmas. But she decided to see how much they would yield and the next morning she started out. Pawnshops—where were such places? She wandered about aimlessly at first; finally she asked a policeman. He looked at her quizzically as he gave her directions. She finished up on Third Street. She went home with thirty dollars in her purse, really much more than she had expected. Thirty dollars! That ought to put off the day of reckoning until Carter was ready to face it. She was strangely happy. By her own efforts to have even postponed the inevitable—just this fact made her glow secretly. She felt as if she were justifying her existence. Wouldn't he be proud of her when he discovered the truth!

* * *

Carter had a relapse. They stayed out too long in the garden one day and he took cold. The doctor scolded. In bed again, for another week. Adrienne

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sat by his bedside and read the news to him. War clouds gathering. It looked as if the United States would be forced in, now, without doubt. That meant a draft. The war wouldn't be popular enough to hazard recruits on a volunteer system.

"A draft?" echoed Adrienne, setting down the paper.

"Yes. . . . All the men between certain ages . . . registered and called in their turn."

"You—for instance?"

"Everybody."

Adrienne was silent. Carter called to war! Finally she said. "Would you like that?"

"Not being drafted. I'd much rather volunteer. I wish I were over there now—in the thick of it."

Now—this minute! He wanted to be away—on the wing! She could feel her quickened heart beats thundering in her ears. But that pride which was so often her salvation made her lips frame a quick reply. "Oh, yes, I understand. With those college friends you once spoke about. Flying. Or picking up the wounded. A man likes that, doesn't he?"

"Well, not just that, perhaps. . . . Not war in so many words. But a man doesn't like a soft life. Inactivity. If there's a war he wants to be in it . . . not dozing by a fireside."

"All men don't," she protested. "There was Karl—Karl von Stralendorf. He hated the idea. He was frightened."

"But he went just the same. . . . I daresay I'll have my bad moments, too. But, to a man, anything is better than this!"

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She caught her breath, stifled for a moment by his vehemence. It wasn't as if he were intent on consciously wounding her. It was his simplicity that was so devastating—baring his heart without attempt or design. "How would you go about it?" she asked. "I mean—jumping in before you're made to?"

"That would be too easy. . . . A man without responsibilities could be in the thick of it in a month."

A strange perverseness made her press the point. "Well, aren't yours all over now?"

He caught her hand tenderly. "I've still got *you*, remember."

A responsibility. So that's what she was! In spite of her pride she threw him a wounded glance. "Oh, well," she ventured with questionable lightness, "you'll go finally. . . . You'll have to go, responsibility or no responsibility, when they draft you."

He shrugged. There was no matching his chagrin. "That depends on how long the session lasts. Unmarried men will get first call."

She was powerless to check the words which leaped to her lips. "But you're not married."

He let her hand drop with a gesture of exasperation. "Adrienne!"

She rose and left the room silently. A responsibility! *A responsibility!* It was too hateful.

* * *

Spring was coming. The lily bulbs in the garden had spent all their efforts toward greenness and were bursting into shy bloom. Pale narcissus, with a promise of gold in the still tightly bound buds of the jon-

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quils. Spring was coming and with it an increasing gleam of vagrancy in Carter Fosdick's eyes. Besides, he was almost well again. Youth and spring and a far horizon. Youth straining at the leash of inactivity. Not that he voiced his unrest, but it was there, as clear as day to her. In the first heat and humiliation of failure he had broken with his background. He was reaching out for another. Struggling toward another background with a weight tugging at his heels—a responsibility—Adrienne. She saw it all, now, in every gesture, hidden beneath every casual word, lurking in his very tenderness. He was determined upon marriage. Too determined. It was as if he felt the need of tying himself down irrevocably to preserve his own integrity. As if, under the surge and pressure of the desire for faring forth, he might find himself one day upon the highroad and his honor as a gentleman left behind. Elements of fineness, these, but lacking in fervor. Manners always are lacking in fervor. The Kajetans of life may be ruthless, but at least they are true to impulse. Which were the better—to live a lie for convention's sake or be truthful and brutal in one breath? Which took the greater courage?

In the end Adrienne knew that happiness for her could never lie in exacting tribute. In that, she was like her mother before her; and, already, she tasted a faint bitterness in the kisses which Carter still pressed upon her lips.

* * *

Finally, the last penny of the thirty dollars was spent. The obvious thing was to tell Carter, but the

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thought was frightening. Well, not frightening, perhaps, but distasteful. It seemed impossible to broach the subject herself; now, more than ever. Somehow, the fact that she was a responsibility seemed bound up in terms of money, which made it all the more unbearable. No, she couldn't bring herself to say: "We need money for food—*my* food." And so she went down Third Street again with the last trinket she owned —the ring of soft Chinese gold encrusted with crude pearls that Karl had given her on that first Christmas at Laguna Vista. The pawnbroker was a dapper young man with thick, black curly hair and red cheeks. He gave the ring one disparaging glance and said:

"That's a piece of junk. . . . I wouldn't loan a half-dollar on it."

She felt relieved, glad. She took the ring from him and put it back on her finger. He glanced at her quickly and a voluptuous look came into his eyes.

"Well, I don't know," he began, "maybe, after all—let's see it again."

He did not wait for her to slip the trinket off but caught greedily at her hand and drew it up for a close inspection. She could feel his hot breath upon her fingers and his palm was moist and disagreeably soft like a cushion. Momentarily her shoulders contracted. She withdrew her hand.

His eyes were still a glitter. "For you, dearie—understand—it ain't worth nothing, really, but for you—well, what do you say to five dollars?"

She wanted to refuse but the thought of going home with an empty purse was too unsettling. In the end, of course, she would have to discuss matters with Car-

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er, so there was very little point in such a short postponement of the issue. But she was in a mood to catch at straws, and at last she gave up the ring.

The pawnbroker slipped the money in her hand and patted her caressingly. "Honest, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't do it."

"Yes . . . yes. I understand." She nodded a farewell and moved toward the door to find her escape blocked by the figure of a man. She looked up. The eyes of Forrest Deering were flashing a look of inquiry at her.

* * *

They moved out into the sunshine. Deering said: "I saw you turn into Third from Market Street. At first I wasn't going to follow but, naturally, I was curious. I couldn't imagine what you were doing in this part of town."

She smiled at him bitterly. "And now you know."

"Now, I merely suspect," he corrected. "Come, let's go where we can talk." She made a gesture of protest which he immediately cut short. "Nonsense. I've a hundred things to say to you. And you ought to be talking to some one." He took her arm. "The Palace is just around the corner. What do you say to a little lunch?"

She was divided between fear and confidence. A hundred things to say to her. What, for instance? Well, after all, there was no harm in listening. And besides he was right, she ought to be talking to some one. A shrewd observation.

They found a table in an obscure corner of the Palm

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Court of the Palace Hotel and Deering came directly to the point.

"You're up against it—that's evident enough. . . . Now perhaps you think it's none of my business. You're mistaken. It's everybody's business to keep a charming young girl like you from going to the devil." She flushed. "Don't misunderstand me—I'm not trying to insult you. But there are times in every one's life when plain talk is the thing. And this is one of them. Shall I be quite frank?"

The directness of his attack fascinated her. "Quite," she murmured.

"Well, to begin with, I know the situation. You're living with Carter Fosdick. Why, may I ask?"

"Why?"

"Yes, what's the reason he didn't marry you?"

"Because I didn't wish it."

"You! . . . You mean that was your idea? . . . Come, I didn't cut my eye-teeth yesterday."

"It was my idea," she said quietly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't believe that."

"It's true," she insisted passionately. "Something came over me. I knew that it would be a mistake to marry."

"A mistake to marry anybody?"

"I don't know . . . Anyway, a mistake to marry him."

"Then why did you go with him?"

"Because I loved him," she said clearly.

His voice held just a shade of a sneer. "Oh, I thought Bud Sinclair was in favor at Laguna Vista."

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She looked at him calmly. "At Laguna Vista he was."

"Good. You couldn't have made a better answer. In other words, you've already had enough experience with life to know that love or anything else doesn't last forever. Was that what made you instinctively feel that it would be a mistake to marry Carter Fosdick?"

She leaned forward thoughtfully. "No—not exactly. . . . But something seemed to stand between us—a wall of some sort. . . . You see, he had so much—money, a name, a father. I had none of those things."

"You were right. You'd have had a nasty fight on your hands. Every inch of his background would have crowded you. . . . Not that you couldn't have left him when the goings got too tough, but it would have taken time." He looked at her significantly. "As it is, you haven't a single barrier."

She knew what he meant and yet she found herself forcing him into a corner with: "A single barrier to what?"

"To your leaving him."

"What made you get the idea that I wanted to? . . . Why, I haven't the slightest intention of leaving Carter."

"No? . . . Tell me, just what are you two children planning? I mean, what's your outlook? Not very promising, I'd say, when a young man lets a woman do his pawnshop rustling for him. . . . Now, my dear, don't get indignant. It's always a sign of weakness when any one gets fussed over the truth."

She silently recovered her poise. "That isn't the

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truth. Carter doesn't know what I've been doing."

"Well, he ought to. . . . If you're that hard pressed for funds he ought to know it."

"He's been ill and confused. I didn't want to trouble him."

"He's going to be enormously pleased when he finds out," he said derisively. "There's nothing that a man hates so much as a woman taking the initiative in a matter of that kind. Why hasn't he called on his friends? We'd have helped him."

"I don't think he'd want to do that. He's too proud. He'll find a way out, once he knows." Her voice lifted with a sudden note of recaptured confidence. "He's strong and young and a man."

"All of which is the worst possible bet for you. . . . Youth and strength and manliness haven't much philosophy. Those are qualities that strain at the leash. Oh, sometimes they succumb—accept the inevitable—but they're damned ugly in the process."

She found herself unable to stand up under the skill and precision of his thrusts. Suddenly all her doubts and uncertainties had become flesh, were sitting opposite her in the person of this man aiming unerringly though not unkindly at her questionable security. "What am I to do?" she asked tremulously.

"That's what I brought you here to tell you." He cleared his throat. "You're to marry me."

"You, Mr. Deering! . . . Why, you have a wife."

"Not seriously. . . . You see, Mrs. Deering and I have been doing for ten years what Carter Fosdick and you have been doing for ten weeks—living together. . . . Oh, we had a marriage ceremony, but the intent

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as just the same. It means a slight delay in the eak-up—a matter of six months or so. . . . Mrs. eering has already moved to Reno."

Her feeling dropped from surprise and indignation the secure level of curiosity. "But won't your back-round crowd me, too? As a wife I wouldn't bring ou any more than I could bring Carter."

"I need less, because I'm no longer young. Because have achieved a philosophy. And because I've made ıy own background—which is something. When ou've built up your own stage-set it is yours to do vith as you please. You can even wreck it, if you vant to."

She smiled wanly. "Do you want to wreck it? I nean, is that why you want to marry me?"

"Why not? There are other backgrounds. A man ıt forty realizes that much more than at twenty. I'm fed up on things as they are. . . . I'll let *you* make the background, this time. You want to be a singer, don't you? Well, that will provide an entirely new stage-set for me. We'll go to New York and settle down near the very best voice culturist in the country. And when the present unpleasantness blows over in Europe we'll trek over there. By the time we're ready to come back folks will be falling over themselves to accept us, if we want that sort of thing—which isn't likely."

"You're willing to take me, now—after—"

"You mean that you're not what people call a pure woman? That's only a catch phrase. It isn't the gesture you make that matters. It's the impulse back of it. You went with Carter Fosdick because you loved

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him. You refused to marry him for the same reason. If you'd have been a loose woman you'd have married him and stung him good and proper—alimony and all that sort of thing. You don't have to tell me."

"You do know, don't you! . . . But can't you see, I'm still in love with Carter. And, besides, we're planning to be married at once. Just as soon as he's about again. He's—he's insisting."

He narrowed his eyes. "And what do you think about it?"

"Well—naturally—if he—"

"Are you forgetting what we spoke of at the beginning—his background? . . . It will crowd you just as ruthlessly."

"Ah, but he's broken with that, now. . . . He's ready, just as you are, to build a new one."

"Nonsense. Youth doesn't break with things that easily. Carter is still in the shade of his family tree—he's used to its shadow. But you—you'll find it damned chilly."

* * *

He sent her home in a taxi, waving her a gay farewell as the cab made a spluttering dash forward. She was still tingling from her plunge into the icy waters of reality. She felt that common decency should have made her resentful of every word that Forrest Deering had uttered, but his very candor had something tonic in it. A man who put all his cards on the table had undeniable qualities. He was not seeking to snare her with any romantic claptrap. He desired her quite frankly and she had a sense of his innate fairness. He

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new the best and the worst about her and he was epared to go the limit.

No, she could not be displeased, indignant. Nor ould she be convinced that his literal philosophy was orrect. To use his own phrase—youth couldn't break ith things that easily. And, in spite of the slings nd arrows of outrageous fortune, the glow of life as ne wished it warmed and animated her impulses. Car-r might still be in the shadow of his family tree but he was equally in the shadow of Carter. And the urther she escaped from Deering's genially cynical resence the greater became her recaptured confidence. t was as if every flabby faith within her had been trung taut by Forrest Deering's attempt to strain them o the breaking-point. There is nothing that crystal-izes the wavering impulses of youth as much as op-osition. And as for hearing the truth—what youth vorthy of the name cares a fig for such an abstrac-ion?

* * *

She squandered nearly every cent of the five dollars on a feast of things that Carter liked. He growled with hunger as the enticing smells of his favorite dishes escaped from baking dish and stewpan. This was his first real appetite in weeks. Carter well again. Adrienne was thrilled and a little wistful. His need of her would not be so great, now. And then there was the uncertainty of the future. It made her realize that he could offer no excuses even to himself for fur-ther inaction. To-morrow they would have to face the economic realities of life. The thought was hateful

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but stimulating. Where would their quest for a livelihood lead them? Perhaps she might do something.

They would have to leave their cloister-home. That went without saying. Leave the barred windows that had kept the world at bay all through those first few deliriously happy weeks. Leave the garden tiptoeing on the threshold of spring; before the plane tree budded and became green wreathed again. Move out into the hurly-burly of life, as a certain couple had once moved from the soft seductions of Eden to the sharp realities of an untilled field. The dissolution of Eden. It was a continuous performance, for, like the captured bluebird, paradise achieved ceased to be paradise. At the moment of its ultimate possession its tranquillity turned into clamorous questings and all its drowsy by-paths into sharply defined highroads leading to the wilderness. But, at least, the wilderness was an adventure.

* * *

The dinner was a triumph and while Carter was drowsing over his black coffee there came a ring at the bell. A startling circumstance since they had no visitors now that the tag ends of business had been cleared up. Adrienne made a half-frightened movement toward the door but Carter leaped to his feet and had opened it in short order.

A messenger with a letter and package for Adrienne. She opened the letter first, conscious of Carter's curious gaze. It was from Forrest Deering. He had gone back to the pawnshop and talked the clerk into allowing him to redeem Adrienne's ring. A somewhat ir-

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regular procedure achieved by a generous tip and his assurance as a gentleman that it was being returned to its rightful owner. As she mechanically folded the letter together she felt herself trembling. What was she to say to Carter? His gaze was still turned frankly upon her and there was nothing for her to do but open the package. He saw the ring almost the instant it was disclosed to view.

"I thought there was something missing from your hand," he said. "What happened—did one of the pearls fall out?"

For an instant her heart leaped at the prospect of so easy an escape from the awkward truth. The briefest murmur of assent would convince him that the ring had been returned from a repair shop. But a desperate impulse found her blurting out, "No. I pawned it this morning!"

He rose and came toward her. "Pawned it—this morning!"

"Yes. I had no money."

"Why didn't you speak to me about it?"

"I thought until you were feeling better that—you see, I didn't want to worry you. It began over a week ago. I took my Christmas presents down and got thirty dollars on them. To-day I could only raise five."

He was still incredulous—still almost speechless. When his lips moved they could only repeat her phrases. "A week ago . . . your Christmas presents . . . thirty dollars. Why that's ridiculous."

She found herself growing calmer. "No, I don't think so. We needed money for food."

"But you could have asked me . . ."

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"What could you have done? You had no money."

"What made you think that? . . . I'm more or less broke—but thirty dollars. I could have scraped that much together if you had told me. Certainly a situation like that is something I have a right to know. No man wants a woman reduced to the humiliation of pawning her trinkets to feed him."

His voice was full of cold, restrained anger. And his chill was communicated to her as she said:

"There was nothing humiliating about it—nothing humiliating to me. There never could be anything humiliating to me in doing a service for any one I loved."

Her simplicity softened him. "Ah, of course—I understand. You meant well." His voice was hateful with condescension. "But another time—please—*please* remember that there are some things a man can't endure. Especially a man who has any background. You see, my dear, I wasn't brought up to the notion of letting women do more than their share—or even quite so much if it comes to that."

Background! *A man who had any background!* Still in the shadow of his family tree. How right, how terribly right, Forrest Deering had been.

"You'll have to be patient," she said. "There are so many things about life I don't know."

He was moving closer with a caressing gesture when his glance fell upon the letter where she had dropped it on the table. "If you pawned your ring this morning I can't quite understand why it was returned to-night."

She never realized how ridiculous the truth could sound. How difficult it could be to tell it. "Forrest

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Deering sent it back. He saw me coming out of the pawnshop. We had lunch together."

"Lunch with Forrest Deering! Have you lost your senses? And what did you tell him?"

"It wasn't necessary to tell him much. He seemed to know all about everything."

"You mean he discussed me? Forrest Deering sat with you at a lunch table and talked over my private affairs . . . my financial straits?"

"Not exactly but—"

"Not exactly—*not exactly!*" He gave a dry laugh. "Well, I don't see what else you could call it. God! Don't you think I have any pride?"

"I'm sorry. It was unfortunate. Meeting him was all so sudden, so confusing. And when we got to lunch he brought up subjects. He was really terribly kind in his way. He seemed to think you ought to let your friends do something for you—help you."

"His sort, I suppose. Well, that's at least one humiliation I can spare myself. . . . And when you left me out of the conversation—what did you talk about, then?"

"I don't remember—nothing of any importance."

He looked at her shrewdly and she knew that he read the truth which her evasiveness had tried so clumsily to conceal. "I think," he said, "that it's high time we were getting married."

* * *

He closed the issue so suddenly upon the high note of decisiveness that Adrienne felt as if a door had been slammed in her face. A thousand questions re-

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mained unanswered. She would have liked to talk out every problem before them—every problem that the future held. This was the time, now. And yet the moment passed—passed with understanding almost within reach.

Next morning he asked her for a list of bills. She gave him the items and he put on his hat and went out, whistling with unpleasant bravado.

She was glad to be alone.

She could see how hurt, how wounded he was. And she could understand it. The wound of his failure still raw, stung by her thoughtless initiative.

He came back late in the afternoon, looking fagged but still putting up a swagger. He gave her money to meet their obligations and he said:

"We'll be married on Sunday. . . . I got a job today—keeping time in a construction camp up in Humboldt. The company gives us living quarters. We'll be leaving Monday."

Monday! Leaving their cloister and their garden on Monday. For quarters in a construction camp in Humboldt. She had an idea what that would be like. Once, when the county put a new road into the Crystal Lake country, she had seen a construction camp. Huddled tents and portable houses set in narrow alleys spilling over with fly-bitten dogs and children. With a fine, white powdered dust over everything. Not that it would matter if Carter's heart were in the venture. But she knew that wasn't so—she knew that it couldn't be so. And she was equally sure that no friend of Carter Fosdick's had ever offered him any such job. He had gone out blindly in a penitential fury and taken

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the first thing that offered—that was thrown his way. Making a desperate gesture out of sheer defiance. Showing the world—that was it. Showing the world that he could earn his way by the sweat of his brow, showing the world that he could face his duty, showing the world that he could marry and do the square thing. Making a sacrifice of himself. Adrienne could not put all these things into words but she could feel them, half guess at them, be depressed by them. Married on Sunday. Quickly, to get it over. That was the feeling, the tone in his voice as he said it.

A packet of mail had come that afternoon from France. A packet of mail from the college chums of Carter romantically adventuring for a desperate cause. She brought the letters to him after dinner and he drew his chair under the reading lamp and devoured their contents. . . . Later he fell to dreaming—sat for over an hour staring into space—a look of faring-forth in his eyes. A young eagle chained to a hen-roost looking wistfully up at a slit of illimitable sky showing through the roof.

Married on Sunday. Keeping time in a construction camp in Humboldt.

She ought to do something. She ought to save him. She ought to set him free. . . . *Set him free!* Her heart stood still.

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Chapter Fifteen

THE next morning, at breakfast, the doorbell rang again. This time Carter let Adrienne answer it. A black child with a message from Selina. She was dying and would Adrienne come see her, at once? At the home of one of her race in Oakland—in the quarter of the town where the families of Pullman porters lived. Adrienne slipped on her hat and cloak and went with the child.

They took a street car and then a ferry. Adrienne had never been on the Oakland side before. At the end of the ferry trip, they boarded a train and got out finally in a neighborhood bleak if not exactly squalid. They walked a block and came upon a faded blue cottage with a scabby acacia tree beside a gate. The child halted and Adrienne went up the steps. A comfortable-looking negress opened the door and ushered Adrienne in.

Selina sat in a huge chair, her face, shrunken like a withered apple, standing out in pitiful relief against the white pillow supporting her head. As Adrienne came close to the dying woman her eyes smoldered and flared up with uncanny brilliance. She motioned Adrienne to stoop over.

"Sing, honey," she said, "sing for me."

Adrienne drew back and turned a beseeching glance toward the negress who had admitted her. The woman nodded encouragement.

Selina's pitiful old voice rose midway between a

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whine and profound despair. "Ain't you gwine to sing for your Mammy—for the last time?"

Adrienne straightened herself. *Tassels on My Boots.* Could she? It was too incongruous—before a dying woman in a bandbox of a room with crayon portraits, in oak and silver frames, casting thick-lipped smiles down upon her. She cleared a little space, in front of Selina, of cluttering furniture. The negress looked on quizzically.

"I dance, too, when I sing," Adrienne explained. Selina nodded chuckling approval. The negress grinned.

Adrienne began the first verse. It was ghastly and yet she wanted to laugh—singing and taking little mincing steps like an awkward, overgrown child. Suddenly she swung into the refrain. "Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!" The room melted, the grinning negress faded away. She was alone with Mammy on the veranda of the big house on a hot summer afternoon with the unforgettable odor of the fig grove weighting the still air.

"Tassels on my boots, tassels on my boots!" The veranda of the big house fading. The cool drip of memory on the senses. The fig grove itself—a double row of smooth-trunked trees stooped with age. Blue-black fruit set cunningly upon sleek limbs. Mammy parting the gloom. Mammy, slow-moving and graceful like a turkey. Mammy bronze like a turkey without the iridescence. . . . Fig trees, over-ripe fruit falling plummet-wise, chickens, turkeys, the brown slenderness of Mammy, white kerchiefs, golden ear-

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hoops, a moss-agate brooch. Merged, blurred, softly fused like a faint pastel.

"Tassels on my boots! tassels on my boots!" The veranda of the big house again. Mammy in the driveway clapping her hands.

"Why, honey-child, I do believe you're going to be a singer!"

* * *

Back in the bandbox room again, with crayon portraits in oak and silver frames, casting down thick-lipped smiles. The shrunken face moving to a weazened animation. Mammy's fingers beckoning.

Adrienne answered their call and bent over again. The faintly brown hands, thin to emaciation, crept up to her hair. She felt her face drawn forward. Mammy's eyes were close to Adrienne's, closer, it seemed, than they had ever been. For the first time she saw their pathetic reality. Deep, fathomless pools, murky and haunted; pools mirroring jungle and slave-ship and human market-place; pools deep with gentleness and cruelty and degradation; pools luminous with tenderness, defiance, triumph. The hands dropped from Adrienne's hair and swept her cheek, damp, clammy hands. Adrienne tried to check a shudder but to no purpose. The tremor communicated itself to Mammy. She made a supreme effort and flung Adrienne away.

"The same blood in our veins—that's what makes you shiver!"

Was it true? Had she shivered at kinship or the

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touch of death? Couldn't she be gentle and suave in this last hour? She made a movement of compassion. Selina waved her away and called for the negress. The woman stepped forward and Selina whispered in her ear.

"She has some money for you," the woman said as she rummaged in the drawer of a bureau and brought out a large purse stuffed with gold and silver and a few bills.

A choking whisper came from Selina. "Tell her."

The woman explained. This was the last of a nest-egg that Adrienne's mother had given before her death to Selina. Every cent save this had been spent on Adrienne. Accounted for to the last penny in a thumbed memorandum book with a red-leather cover. A little over a hundred dollars left.

"She wants you to see her will, too." The negress handed Adrienne a folded document.

Adrienne sat and stared, feeling frightened—for some reason, frightened and inadequate. Finally she opened it.

"I, Selina Sinclair Parsons, being of sound mind—" Selina *Sinclair* Parsons. Adrienne grew faint. She pulled herself together and read on. Bequests here, bequests there; trinkets, jewelry, cash. To unimportant people who meant nothing to Adrienne. "And the residue of my estate to my grand-niece, Justine Wentworth Forsythe, as a mark of my tender love and affection."

Instinctively Adrienne leaped to her feet. "No—no! . . . Not this . . . You mustn't!"

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The voice of unclean laughter beat against the four walls of the room. Selina was chuckling with a horrible, gobbling sound.

Adrienne crushed the paper between her palms.

Selina drew herself up with herculean effort. "Take it away from her!" she screamed. "Take it away from her before she does anything." The negress caught Adrienne roughly and tore the paper from her clenched fingers. Selina's laughter increased. "On the front page of every newspaper in the country!" she shrilled. "My grand-niece—Justine Wentworth Forsythe! Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Mixed bloods forever at the fever heat of civil war . . . consuming themselves . . . laying waste happiness.

"My grand-niece—Justine Wentworth Forsythe!"

Again the unclean laughter. Ending upon a final note of savage joy. Adrienne put her fingers to her ears and in that moment Selina Parsons fell forward—dead.

* * *

Adrienne came out into the clean, bright noon-tide, shuddering. The shabby purse which had hoarded the remains of funds intrusted to Selina's keeping was in her hands.

Selina dead! Selina—to the end the same perplexing bundle of contradictions. Scrupulously rendering an account of her stewardship. Indulging in the obscene joy of diabolical revenge. *My grand-niece—Justine Wentworth Forsythe!* Could any retaliation have been more subtle—more satanic?

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She felt a desire for brisk, physical motion. To walk, to walk. To quicken her pace and release all her controlled emotions in sudden action. An overwhelming sense of loneliness submerged her. The last link in her old life was gone. She stood alone. Alone? . . . Was she forgetting Carter—forgetting the man she was to marry on Sunday? Why, Sunday was to-morrow. Only one more day of freedom. Freedom! What made her think of it in those terms? Was she the daughter of her father, after all? Or was she mirroring the pathetic outline of Carter with that look of faring forth in his eyes?—a young eagle chained to a henroost, peering up at a slit of illimitable sky showing through the roof.

A purse with a trifle over a hundred dollars in her hands. It gave her a feeling of security—almost power. Did the possession of money always do that? Her money. All her own. For the first time in her life. Suddenly, her cloister home, the garden, the budding plane tree grew remote. Already it belonged to the past. She reconstructed it, reached out for it, yearned toward it and yet it seemed just beyond like an enchanted garden in a dream.

She began to think vaguely of taking the ferry back to San Francisco. But, instead, she wandered about, drifting toward the Lakeshore district. She found a bench beside the lake and sat down. Hundreds of wild fowl were swimming in the security of hunterless waters. Wild fowl, sleek, placid, well-fed. Had they lost the urge to be up and off with the coming of spring? Would they ever again feel the call of chill, mountain waters, their wings up-poised upon the rim

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of the world? How many times, at Laguna Vista, with the first hint of mellow weather had she seen wild ducks close to the water speeding north with a triumphant beat of wing, or the geese, far up in the blue, crying their freedom.

Cloistered gardens; city lakes. Were they sure despoilers of spring frenzies?

Toward mid-afternoon she rose and went back to the heart of the town again.

"I must go home," she kept saying to herself. "Carter will be waiting."

But she stood in strange indecision, letting train after train depart.

The newsboys were crying an extra. She saw the headlines coming toward her, dancing insistently into her consciousness.

NEGRESS LEAVES ESTATE TO SOCIETY KIN

Justine's picture, Jed's picture, the picture of Bess. Would it be possible for them to take this blow standing? What a malicious world it was, after all.

* * *

She was loitering before the foyer of an emptying theater when the next faint urge to move toward home assailed her. A traveling opera company, with prominent guest artists, had been holding forth. A little stir at the stage entrance drew her toward it. The prima donna of the afternoon was leaving, wrapped in heavy furs, blowing kisses right and left to the knot

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of female admirers who, sheep-like, crowded her escape.

A faded little woman standing beside Adrienne said: "That's Madame Fortini. She isn't Italian at all. Fort is her real name—Minnie Fort. She used to live in the same little town with me. We were girls together. . . . She made herself. Used to work as waitress in a summer resort. Saved her money and—"

"Made herself, nothing!" cried a blowsy female, breaking into the conversation. "I know them primy donners. Get some man to put up for them. That's how they get their start. Don't tell me!"

"Nothing of the kind," said the little woman with pallid indignation. "She saved her money and took singing lessons. Then she sang in church. . . . One day a road show came along and she went with them. In the chorus. Everybody was terribly shocked. I was myself. . . . But she was right. Next thing we knew, she was on the front page of the newspaper. Singing grand opera in New York! Little Minnie Fort—imagine!"

"What of that?" sneered the blowsy one again. "I say a man done it for her. And I'm right. She's got an angel that's what she's got. Look at them furs she's wearing."

"Why, she makes thousands and thousands of dollars. I forget how much they pay her every time she sings."

"Pooh!" said the other and moved on.

"Isn't that the way?" queried the faded woman. "Folks never give anybody any credit. . . . I used to sing myself. And I had a good voice, too, if I do say

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it. But I just never had any push. I used to get frightened whenever I thought about striking out. Then, I got married. . . . I sometimes wonder if I could have done as well as Minnie Fort if I'd had any courage. . . . But you've got to break away from things and cut loose and take your chances. I guess it isn't all a bed of roses."

Adrienne spoke for the first time. "Are you sorry you married?"

"No—I mean, not exactly. I've got a good husband. And two children—a boy and a girl. But a person can't help thinking what would have happened if—"

The woman's voice faded to an inarticulate whisper. The flash of a former conviction went through Adrienne's mind. "But can't you see," she said, "that the only possible thing is the thing that happens. If it doesn't happen it isn't possible."

A confused look came into the spiritless eyes. "You —mean fate?"

"I suppose I do. . . . And, yet, it isn't quite that either. I can feel it. But I can't put it into words."

The woman smiled back a shadowy understanding. "You sing, don't you?"

"What made you think that?"

"The way you speak—you've got a musical voice. . . . And waiting here at the stage door. I thought, perhaps, you'd come for a try-out. They've advertised for some extra singers for the chorus. . . . I might as well confess. I had a brain storm. I came down today to try for it. But, of course, I'm too old. I don't know what got into me. I couldn't leave my husband or the children. I knew that all along and yet—if

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'd been a genius I mean to money with [illegible] me—not even that. That's what you [illegible] I guess when you say that the only possible way I can [illegible] that happens. What happens is all [illegible] we really are.'

She moved away, smiling a little herself. [illegible] serene smile at her daughter, a little wise with a lark's throat but not the strength of body or [illegible] flight. A woman that knew nothing about a [illegible] life; coming down to a modest income in the [illegible] of a career.

Adrienne looked out of [illegible] stage door. [illegible] chewing gum. [illegible] a job even in the [illegible] The question [illegible] Could she [illegible] to try. [illegible] test herself.

She [illegible]

* * *

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'd been a genius I suppose nothing would have stopped me—not even that. That's what you mean, I guess, when you say that the only possible thing is the thing that happens. What happens to us comes out of what we really are."

She moved away, nodding a wistful farewell. Adrienne smiled at her sadly. A drab little wren with a lark's throat but not the strength of wing for upward flight. A woman past forty yearning toward a fuller life; coming down in a belated frenzy to try out for a career.

Adrienne noticed two or three girls going in the stage door. Cheaply dressed, smeared with lip-stick, chewing gum. Was it possible that they could get a job even in the chorus? Could she, herself, get one? The question crackled out sharply from nowhere. *Could she, herself, get one?* Well, it would be fun to try. To try as an experiment—as an adventure—to test herself.

She decided to go in.

* * *

The doorman was talking to the three girls who had preceded her. "Nothing doing. . . . You're too late. We're all fixed up."

"Oh, well!" threw back one of them, "we should worry! . . . Grand opera ain't our line, anyway."

Adrienne drew aside to let them pass her. Then she started to follow.

"Hey there, you!"

She faced about. "You mean me?"

"Yes. What's your business?"

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"I came in about the chorus. But if you're—"

"Say, we're full when it comes to them birds. . . . *Not their line.* . . . I'll say it ain't. A burlesque show is about their speed—and doing the sticks at that. . . . I don't say we've got a job for *you.* But if you wanta hang around awhile maybe you'll get a chance to warble."

Hang around awhile. Should she? At this rate she wouldn't get home until after dark. Carter was bound to be worried. Well, perhaps not really worried. After all, he'd think she was at Selina's.

"Well, wanta wait?"

"All right," she said.

He beckoned her to follow him down a corridor lined with dressing-room doors. Suddenly they were back stage and picking their way between ropes and electric wires and lighting apparatus. The sound of a jangling piano came toward them. Interrupted by shuffling feet.

"One, two, three! . . . One, two, three!"

Her guide opened a side door. It led down shallow steps to the auditorium. He pointed.

"You sit down there—out in front. When they're through with this here stunt—go up and ask for Kleinberg."

She picked her way through the sudden gloom to a seat. "This here stunt" proved to be a ballet rehearsal.

"One, two, three . . . one, two, three . . . on your toes. Everybody on your toes. Smile, smile. You look like a row of ten-day stiffs. Can't you smile? . . . For Christ's sake, smile!"

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Ballet music from "Faust." She knew it well. Karl used to play it.

"One, two—on your toes! *toes! toes!* . . . I said *toes!*"

The music stopped. A charming, slender creature ran out from the wings and spoke to the man standing near the piano who had been calling time.

"Sure. That's what I keep telling them." He rapped for attention. The line of girls crowded forward. "Madame Bellini, here, says you jerk too much. You're like jumping-jacks. That ain't the idea. Float, float. Get me. Now, let's try it all over again."

Madame Bellini, the dancer. Adrienne had read something in the paper about her only yesterday. An Oakland girl returning from a continental triumph, filling a brief home-town engagement between seasons. The rehearsal went forward. At a given point, Madame Bellini came on the stage again, indicating her business. Not really dancing, just giving the skeleton of her performance for the necessary cues. Finally it was finished. Madame Bellini floated off the stage. A man came halfway to meet her, carrying a shawl. There was something familiar about his outline, but the face was blurred in the half-light.

Adrienne rose and went up to the man who had been playing the piano.

"I was told to ask for Kleinberg," she said.

"Kleinberg! *Kleinberg!*"

A funny little figure shuffled somewhere out of the dimness—with a frock coat and heavy glasses.

"Somebody want me?"

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"Yes, you advertised for singers for—"

"Oh, chorus, eh! . . . Well, what have you brought to sing? Let's see your music."

"I haven't any . . . I heard about this by accident. I—"

"How can you sing without music? . . . What do you know?"

She named rapidly, breathlessly, some of the songs that Karl had taught her. The pianist was the first to protest. "I can't play any of them things without music."

Mr. Kleinberg said: "I thought you wanted to sing in this chorus. This is grand opera—not drawing-room entertainment."

Adrienne turned desperately to the pianist. "Perhaps you can play *The Lorelei?*"

Everybody laughed, including the dancing master. Adrienne was furious. "I know it's as old as the hills," she said with stifled indignation. "But Kajetan listened to me sing it. And he didn't laugh. As a matter of fact he played the accompaniment."

The pianist rose. "Kajetan—you mean the great Kajetan? Played *The Lorelei* for you while you sang?" His voice rose to sneering incredulity. "And who are you, pray?"

Who was she? Kajetan's daughter if they only knew. But of course they wouldn't believe that even if she told them. The realization stiffened her determination, her pride.

"I'm just nobody, now. But I can sing. I know that. For Kajetan told me I could. And he played while I sang."

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"Where?"

"At a private dinner party. In the home of Mrs. Jed Forsythe. Mrs. Jed Forsythe of San Francisco."

She drew herself up proudly. Every one must have heard of the Forsythes.

"Forsythe!" broke in the dancing master. "That's the woman who's on the front page of the paper this afternoon—related to a nigger or something."

Already! Why, it wasn't possible! Here—back stage in a theater. To have heard, to remember, to care about remembering. *The woman who's related to a nigger.* Poor Justine!

Kleinberg adjusted his glasses. "Let her try it," he hazarded. "You can play *that,* surely."

The pianist shrugged and sat down again. Mr. Kleinberg cocked his head on one side. The ballet master smiled broadly. They thought her funny. She could see that. They were letting her sing out of sheerest curiosity.

Not that they fancied she had a voice. But just to see how ridiculous she could be—this young woman who claimed the great Kajetan as an accompanist, who talked about singing in the house of a woman related to a nigger.

The sound of hammering came from the wings.

The pianist began. She took a deep breath. Presently she heard her own voice like something thin and strange and eerie coming as if from afar. A terrible silence followed. Even the hammering ceased. Ceased. Why? . . . Why was everything so still? She sang on and on. She was desperate and frightened and yet

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she sang. Suddenly, the piano stopped. She realized that it was over.

* * *

A look of sly caution was in Mr. Kleinberg's eyes. He said: "Er, well, we might find a place for you. . . . You know German, eh? And French?"

"A little."

"How about Italian? . . . No? Well, that's the most important of all with a road show like this. And if you don't know a single opera. Our chorus is made up of old-timers—singers who know their stuff."

"But I can learn—surely. . . . After a little I'll know my stuff, too!"

Her own eagerness surprised her. Why was she arguing, pleading? She hadn't the slightest intention of joining the show. She'd just come in on a whim.

The ballet master threw her an appraising glance. "Better grab her, Kleinberg," he said with good-natured malice. "For a quarter I'd run her into the ballet. Ever dance?"

Had she ever danced? "Tassels on My Boots." But, of course, he wouldn't understand that. She shook her head.

Kleinberg rubbed his hands together. "Well, all right. I'll take a chance. We'll give you twenty-five a week and transportation. Come back at eight o'clock and get your railroad ticket. We leave at midnight, after the show, for Salt Lake. . . . But, understand, it will be May before we get to New York. So if you're joining for a quick spin to Broadway just fade out."

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She stared at him speechless. When she found her voice he had disappeared. The pianist closed down the piano while the ballet master hunted for his overcoat.

Adrienne groped her way back to the shallow steps leading to the stage.

Twenty-five a week . . . midnight . . . Salt Lake . . . New York in May. Her pulses were leaping, her heart thundering. On the wing . . . the world before her . . . Married Sunday . . . to-morrow . . . she and Carter.

She ought to be getting home.

* * *

As she stepped up and into the wings again, a little shriveled woman ran forward and grasped her hands. "My dear—you've got it! The spark, I mean. . . . I know, because I've heard all the best—Sembrich, Nordica, Tetrazzini—all of them. I studied myself with the great Marchesi. . . . Yes, my dear, I had hopes once in that direction, myself. But an illness—never mind—anyway, I lost my voice. But I had to eat, so I became a wardrobe woman. I've been a wardrobe woman for forty years. With all the big shows—singing shows—that's why I know what I'm talking about."

Adrienne felt the little woman's glow. "You're very kind, I'm sure," she said inadequately.

"Nonsense, I'm only telling you the truth. You've got a natural voice. It won't take too much cultivation. Just so you don't start off on the wrong foot. Some singers have to work and work, but you won't. Tetraz-

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zini was that way. She'd had so little instruction—really you'd be surprised. When you get to New York I'll introduce you to the best man in the business. When he hears you sing he'll take you on for nothing!"

"Do you really think so? Would anybody do that?"

"Surely. It's done all the time, if you're big enough. It's the mediocrities who pay twenty-five dollars an hour. . . . But just one piece of advice"—her voice sank to a whisper—"hold back all you can. Your voice, I mean. Don't sing a note more than you have to. Let the old war-horses do the bawling. You just fake it. . . . And, another thing—don't waste time with any of the men around here. They're not big enough to get you anywhere. Forchetti—the ballet man. He'll make you if he can. Kleinberg will be easier to handle. Just kid them both along. A woman never has to come to a dead stop with men if she can keep them going—up on their toes. Keep them up on their toes. Expectations—in other words. They're all school boys. It's the apple just out of reach. . . . Remember that. Always keep a little ahead of them. Not too far. But just a branch beyond. You understand."

The little woman bustled away. Adrienne found the corridor leading to the stage door. Madame Bellini was just in front of her, wrapped in a Spanish shawl, preparing to leave the theater. Her dressing-room door was open and a man's voice called out: "Shall I bring along your coat?"

"No—don't bother. It isn't a bit cold."

The doorman sprang up and opened the stage door.

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Madame Bellini tripped lightly out. The man came out of the dressing-room. It was Forrest Deering.

* * *

He gave Adrienne one searching glance and called to the doorman:

"Help Madame Bellini into my car. And tell her I'll be with her in just a minute."

The man nodded and flew after the dancer's vanishing figure. Forrest Deering stepped back into the dressing-room and beckoned Adrienne. She went in and he half closed the door. Adrienne spoke first.

"I've had an offer to go on the road with this company. In the chorus."

"Nonsense. What do you know about such work? Besides, if you've got any voice at all, that's a sure way to ruin it."

"Oh, I don't think so," she smiled, remembering the little wardrobe woman. "I can hold back and do a lot of faking."

"Where did you get any such an idea as that? . . . Why, you wouldn't last through one rehearsal. You'd wilt at the first 'goddamn' from the director. . . . What's become of Carter? I thought he was going to marry you."

"He is—on Sunday. We're going up into Humboldt County. He's got a job as time-keeper in a construction camp."

"Then, you're not going with this show?"

"I don't know . . . I haven't made up my mind. I've got until eight o'clock to think it over."

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He moved close to her. The odor of fine cigars and the faint perfume of talcum from a recent shave were mingled until they gave out a sense of something pungently masculine, something cleanly voluptuous. "That means you've decided to break with him. I know enough about women to get that. There wouldn't be a single question—a doubt in your mind—if you felt the way you did last week, before I talked to you. Now, look here, this chorus stuff is all tommy-rot. If you're thinking of a career go about it in the right way. What I said the other day still holds. Let me put you through in style. I can do in two years what it would take twenty the direction you're going. Do you know the life you're up against here? One-night stands, grueling rehearsals, all the filth and nastiness you'll have to wallow through? . . . What do you suppose they're hiring you for? Not your voice. Say, Melba herself couldn't get a job in the chorus. Chorus singing has its own technique, just like everything else. And especially a road show. They haven't time to develop talent. They want old-timers trained in the traditions. . . . If anybody connected with this organization hired you he had a reason." He gave her a hard, unyielding look. "Now, I leave it to you to figure out why. You're no fool."

She felt overcome, suffocated by his presence. Not unpleasantly, but with a sensual inertia. Yet she roused herself to the point of taking a step toward the door.

"I'm scheduled to take Bellini to a studio supper. But I can break away in half an hour if you say so. Let's go somewhere to dinner."

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She moistened her lips. "No—no. I want to be alone. I want to think it over—alone."

"Nonsense. Talk it out—with me. You're too young, too inexperienced, to decide a thing like this for yourself."

The doorman knocked on the door. "Madame Bellini says for you not to be all day, sir."

"Coming . . . coming . . . now, what do you say —dinner—for two? . . . No? . . . Well, I won't insist. Go out and think it over. And if you decide to take me up you'll find the best suite in the Fairmont Hotel waiting for you. I'll phone over and engage it at once. . . . Don't misunderstand. Your own suite. I won't be in the picture until you say the word—when Mrs. Deering gets her final decree, if that suits you. Your own mistress until then. Not so bad, eh? . . . Why, you'd be a fool to throw a chance like that away. You'd win, any way you played the game."

* * *

She came out into a faint dusk. A warm wind stirred and the air seemed full of a spring—truant and provocative. She thought: "What must I do? . . . Have I any choice?"

The streets were clamorous with the hurly-burly of suburban cars hurrying workday crowds home. This was no place to brood upon a future. She must find a quiet spot. Why not the lakeshore again? She made inquiries and found her way back. The wild fowl were huddling in the shadows and the hill districts blossoming with a thousand lights.

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She sat down upon a bench under a bare willow tree. To-morrow—married to-morrow. To Carter Fosdick, son of old Simon S. Fosdick, the fox of Wall Street. To what purpose? To forge chains? To tie herself to a young eagle peering up at a slit of illimitable blue showing through the roof of a hen roost? In a construction camp in Humboldt . . . keeping time . . . Carter Fosdick, earning his bread. *His* bread? *Their* bread. Wasn't that the crux of the whole situation? Scratching in a barnyard for grubs with strength of wing to be up and off upon the plunder of the skies. Could she bear to have him hating her—in the end hating her for his enslavement?

Midnight for Salt Lake . . . New York by May. Earning her own way. Coming at grips with life. Life—gay and hazardous and gripping. Life sordid and foul and unclean. Becoming soiled. Achieving cleanness. Becoming strong. Sinking in the mess. For every possibility there was an alternative. Facing life for the first time. Laguna Vista was not facing life. Shutting out the world in cloistered passion was not facing life. You might veil your eyes before it, you might turn the lock in your door against it, you might keep it at arm's length with upraised hands, but, sooner or later, you must come to grips with it. As the first man and woman did . . . sooner or later, sooner or later.

Besides she had a gift. Hadn't Karl told her that, and the great Kajetan, her father? And now the little wardrobe woman. Shouldn't one develop a gift? Make the most of it? But was the clamorous way always the best way?

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Forrest Deering had a way, too. It was worth considering. The best teachers . . . proper leisure . . . protection. She wasn't afraid to think of Forrest Deering. There was a brusque power about him she liked. And, yet, there was suavity in his directness. He had the capacity to attract also. Not to evoke romance or conjure up the insubstantial dreams. Her heart would never sing or stand still before his smile or frown, but there always would be something easeful and sensual and mastering in his personality. He would minister to flesh-pot cravings. And he would adore her, always. She felt—she knew that. He would always be there where she could put her hand on him. There was comfort in such a thought. A sense of great security.

Married to-morrow. . . . Salt Lake by midnight. . . . The best suite at the Fairmont. . . .

* * *

Clustering fruit hanging below the trellis. Beauty of form and line and limb. Youth beautiful. Youth made for love. Youth with feet made for pressing out the wine of life. Youth a cloak of happiness that will last forever.

The hair of my beloved is a cluster of purple grapes among the yellow vine leaves.

* * *

Let me put you through in style. . . . What do you think they're hiring you for, anyway? . . . Don't misunderstand. Your own suite. I won't be in the picture until you say the word. When Mrs. Deering gets

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her final decree, if that suits you. Not so bad, eh? . . . You'd win any way you played the game.

* * *

My dear, you've got it! The spark, I mean. I know because I've heard all the best . . . A woman never has to come to a dead stop with men if she keeps them going—up on their toes. . . . Expectation in other words . . . It's the apple out of reach . . . Remember that. Always keep a little ahead of them. Not too far. But just a branch beyond.

* * *

Courage is the only thing that matters. Always remember that, Fräulein. . . . Good . . . evil . . . ugliness . . . beauty: they are nothing. . . . It is courage that is the big adventure. It was the adventure that even Christ himself made.

* * *

A movement among the breeding fowl on the lake. The soft thunder of wings. Up, up, up they are mounting. The stir of Spring in the air. Feeling the call of chill mountain waters, longing for wings upoised upon the rim of the world. In the dusk—sleek, placid well-fed things, getting the urge to be up and done with the drowsing content of hunterless waters. Drifting out upon the wings of the wind, far up in the blue, crying their freedom.

* * *

"Ah, so there you are! . . . I ran out on Bellini. I

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couldn't stand the suspense. The suite at the Fairmont is waiting. I've arranged everything. In the most proper fashion. I've even a chaperon for you."

"I'm sorry . . . You shouldn't have troubled. You see, I've decided—"

"Nonsense. It's ridiculous. Listen to me."

"No! No! . . . I'm going!"

"Listen, I say! . . . It's foul and vile and filthy!"

Deering's hands upon her arms. The male force of him descending upon her with all its competent maturity. . . . Life, sordid and foul and unclean. Life; gay and hazardous and gripping. Becoming soiled. Achieving cleanness. Becoming strong. Sinking in the mess. . . . Good . . . evil. Ugliness . . . beauty. They are nothing. Courage . . . the big adventure.

"It's no use . . . I've made up my mind. I want to live! I want to be free!"

Up, up, up . . . far up in the blue . . . poised upon the rim of the world. . . . Drifting out upon the wings of the wind.

Youth triumphant, youth undaunted, youth everlasting.

World without end.

THE END

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